KENOSIS AS LIBERATION

THE KENOTIC THEOLOGY OF HANS URS VON BALTHASAR AS A CRITICAL FOUNDATION FOR AFRICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

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Kenosis as Liberation: The Kenotic Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar as a Critical Foundation for African Liberation Theology

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FOREWORD

As I come to the end of this journey I look over the past four years and I can clearly see the hand of the Almighty God unceasingly sustaining and guiding me. Despite the challenges at the beginning of the first year, I quickly braced myself for the journey that has been both exciting and challenging. I thank God for the gift of good health, guidance and helpful companions.

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As a priest, during my study here in Europe, I had to find a way out to share in the life of faith of Christian communities. In Belgium, I was welcomed into the Christian community of Queen of Peace, SHAPE, as a backup priest. In the Netherlands, I was welcomed by the Sacramentskerk in Nijmegen, and the Church of Our Saviour Parish in The Hague. During the summer holidays, I went to the UK and ministered in St. John Baptist Parish, Westerham, and Our Lady and St. Peter parish, Leatherhead. I am very grateful to the parish priests of these communities, particularly to Fr. Ivan Aquillina, Fr. Michael K. Masterson OBE, Fr. Paul John Camiring, Fr. Sjaak de Boer and their Christian communities for making me feel in a special way the beauty and the universality of our Christian faith. In a similar way, I am thankful to the Marist Brothers

community in Nijmegen for offering me accommodation for the first two years of my commute from Leuven to Nijmegen. When I eventually had to move to Nijmegen as from November 2017, the Jesuits in the Netherlands, through the kindness of Fr. Edward Kimman welcomed me to stay in their facility in a quiet neighbourhood of the university. From Nijmegen, I had to commute to Leuven at least once a month for the last eighteen months. For my accommodation in Leuven, Aid to the Church in Belgium, though the kindness of the directress, Uma Wijnants offered me a well furnished apartment to stay for as long as I had business to do in Leuven.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Theological conversations on the African continent have seen shifts of emphasis from firstly adaptation, whose preoccupation is with finding points of consistency between African cultures and Christian religion, thereby building synergies out of the encounter. Secondly, to inculturation which rejects the imposition of foreign categories and elements on African Christianity and advocates for integration of indigenous African cultures and traditions into the life and teaching of the Church. Then thirdly, to liberation which demands that theology must take seriously the lived experience of the African people. And finally to reconstruction which stresses the public role of the Christian religion and theology in the process of nation building. In this present study I will argue for a relevant and viable theological framework to support these conversations. Before I describe the research question, I would like to clarify certain concepts that could be controversial.

Definitions and concepts

For the purpose of this dissertation, the epithet 'African' will principally refer to the Sub-Saharan region of Africa, to the exclusion of South Africa. This is because the countries that lie in the north of the African continent have different religious demographic structures in comparison with their sub-Saharan counterparts. While Christianity is a minority religion in north Africa, it is populous and has influence and power in the societies of the Sub-Saharan region of Africa. In my consideration of African theology, I have not included South Africa because it has a unique history that provoked a particular theology (e.g. Black liberation theology) that has no direct equivalent in other African countries. In the same vein, in all instances, 'African theology' will consistently mean 'African Christian theology', which for the purpose of this research begins with the nineteenth century missionary work in Africa, and does not date to the early Christian theologies of Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine of the early centuries. Although they were theologians from Africa, they did not theologise specifically about the African reality in the way that modern African theologians have been explicitly doing .

By speaking about 'the African experience' or 'the African reality', I would not want to imply that Africa is a homogenous entity. On the contrary, I am well aware that the continent is very diverse in many ways. I am also equally aware that Africa is on the path to progress and is therefore constantly striving to extricate itself from its troubled past and difficult present realities. Nonetheless, although hope is a Christian virtue, care must be taken

in subscribing to all too positive images of Africa that gloss over the plight and suffering of the vast majority of the poor. It suffices to note that the picture of the socio-economic and political landscape of Africa is depicted differently, depending on the vested interest of the one who gives it. One the one hand it is given positively – not necessarily by optimistic statisticians – but in most cases by those privileged few who profit from Africa's resources and have to present a positive image of the continent as potential for regional and international investment opportunities.[1] According to these optimists, Africa is endowed with valuable resources and has great trade and economic potentials to exploit. In direct contradiction to the description of Africa as a continent teaming with life and opportunities, there is an outcry that Africa is poor, sick, backward continent gripped by recurring circles of forces of social evils.[2] Due to this equivocal descriptions of Africa, it is important that theologians take a critical stance in order to avoid being misled by certain subtle movements engineered by selfish interests and agendas. Taking neither side of such extreme divides which may be ideologically, and politically and economically motivated, I follow the path of African theologians, particularly of the influential thinker Jean Marc Ela. As a sociologist and theologian, he has raised provoking social and theological questions with regard to the African situation, and the role and relevance of the Christian faith in the continent. However, inasmuch as I will draw on the theological insights of Ela as an example of the voices in

[1] Emmanuel Katongole, ""African Renaissance" and the Challenge of Narrative Theology in Africa: Which Story/Whose Narrative?" *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 102 (1998), 30-32. President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa declared that Africa is undergoing renaissance and is ripe for industrialisation and trade. Katongole expresses his reservation with this optimism because it simply resounds and resonates with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank agenda, whose profit-oriented drive does not benefit the common African human person. Furthermore, Katongole observes that in the postmodern context of economic globalisation, the appreciation of Africa's beauty is frivolous and superficial because the determinant is the economic exploitation of Africa. He thus warns against being deceived into these mischievous agenda. He demonstrates his view with a case in Uganda, where the country celebrated its accessibility to Microsoft's Window 98 operating system (when only 2% of the population used computers) whereas over 60% of the population lack access to clean drinking water. Katongole concludes that the fascination with global discussions masks the true reality of the African people as their poor living conditions are hidden from the spotlight. "Post Modern Illusions and the Challenges of African Theology: The Ecclesial Tactics of Resistance," *Modern Theology* 16, no. 2 (2000), 244-245.

[2] Organisation of African Unity, *Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa* (Addis Ababa, 1981), 5. The African heads of states meeting in Lagos, Nigeria in 1980 decried, "Africa… remains the least developed continent. It has 20 out of 31 least developed countries of the world. Africa is susceptible to the disastrous effects of natural and endemic diseases of the cruellest type and is victim of settler exploitation arising from colonialism, racism and apartheid." Although Africa's outward appearance has arguably changed for the better over the last three decades, it still remains the poorest continent of the world. The World Bank's ranking of continents according to their Growth Domestic product (GDP) in 2016 puts Africa at the bottom of the rating. Cf. World Bank, "The Continents of the world Per Capita GDP," https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-continents-of-the-world-by-gdp-per-capita.html [accessed June 10 2019].

African liberation theology, I will also confront his ideas with the kenotic theology of Balthasar.

Description of the theme

The main argument of this dissertation is that if liberation theology would be conceptually grounded in the kenosis of Christ, it could gain relevance for Africa's economic and political situation. It is important to note that my conscious choice for the field of liberation theology does not in any way intend to minimise the significance of the dominant inculturation model, whose emphasis lies in expressing the Christian faith in terms of African world views, concepts and idioms, and this way making it acceptable and relevant to the diversity of African cultures. Similarly, my choice for liberation theology is also not intended to underrate the recent interest of some African theologians in the theology of reconstruction.[3] The argument of deconstructionist theologians is that Africa has come of age and after its independence from colonisation, it is set on an irreversible path to urbanisation, industrialisation and development. They therefore urge the church to seize the opportunity, and gather its energies, resources and participate in the process of nation building.[4]

Nonetheless, notwithstanding the relevance and the issues these theological developments raise, I will argue that in a situation of mass exploitation, injustice and suffering, inculturation has outlived its relevance and the emphasis should be shifted to the liberation motif. The contention is that the shift from inculturation to liberation enables the gospel to be seen as a life-giving force that is capable of transforming the life and situation of the African people.[5] Similarly, the reconstruction strand relies on the premise that Africa has entered a new era that is free of oppression. This claim contradicts the situation of the majority of the African population who are trapped in vicious circle of poverty, exploitation, injustice and many other forms of oppression. Furthermore, the theology of reconstruction operates within a theoretical framework that does not demonstrate the ability to elicit

[3] Charles Villa-Vincencio, *Theology of Reconstruction: Nation Building and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Jesse.N.K Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Education Publishers, 1995).
[4] Rogies Masiiwa, "African Theology of Reconstruction: The Painful Realities and Practical Options," *Exchange* 38, no. 1 (2009), 84-86.
[5] Benezet Bujo, *African Theology: In Its Social Context*, trans. John O'Donohue (Nairobi: St. Paul publications, 1994), 15, 70; Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1989), 12-14; Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh and New York: Edinburgh University Press and Orbis Books, 1995), 128-129.

concrete Christian actions.[6] The reconstruction theology can be said to have been inspired by the fall of apartheid, a specific experience particular of South Africa, and which is not the scope of this study. Reconstruction theology thus is not relevant to the experience of the rest of the Sub-Saharan Africa. And even if it were to be appropriated to the Sub-Saharan Africa, it would nonetheless be an inadequate theology because without equal emphasis on the transcendental dimension of theology, it reduces the role of Christian religion and theology to contributing insights and expertise to the shaping of contemporary Africa. In this way, the main task of theology would be to make religious insights intelligible and relevant to the public. As remarked by Katongole, according to reconstruction theory, the relevancy of Christian religion or theology ultimately depends on the consensus judgement of every player of the public sphere who has to accept as relevant the skills and techniques that the church brings to the table.[7] Considering the foregoing arguments, I will claim that liberation theology is a more relevant theology for Africa. It can uncover the dynamic liberative potential of the gospel and could argue that the Christian faith can effectively contribute to the liberation that people desire. In doing so, the African reality is confronted with the gospel and thereby takes questions of social justice and human flourishing seriously. Liberation theology is context-committed and integrates the social concerns with the spiritual needs into a single unit. Its scope of engagement therefore encompasses both the *ad intra* (the church) and the *ad extra* (society) discussions.

The concept of liberation is not the prerogative of liberation theology. In fact, there is no doubt that the liberative motif has been the kernel of the models and strands of African theology. The liberation theme is also pervasive within many ecclesiastical documents such as apostolic exhortations, bishop's conferences, and pastoral letters of ordinaries and bishops of particular churches. Prominent ecclesiastical documents are not lacking in applying the concept of liberation. In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, the church in Africa is reminded of its mission to the African continent. It strongly declared that the church can truly be the light and salt by responding to the fragility of Africa following the example of Christ. The document urged the church to take its responsibility in the world. This demand, it stressed, is a concrete historical responsibility (no. 15). In fulfilling this

[6] Valentin Dedji, *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003), 80; Julius Gathogo, "Survey on an African Theology of Reconstruction," *Swedish Missiological Themes* 95, no. 2 (2007), 125; Rogies Masiiwa, "African Theology of Reconstruction: The Painful Realities and Practical Options," *Exchange* 38, no. 1 (2009), 94.
[7] Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 44-45.

responsibility, the church is urged to embrace hostility and unpopularity for standing for the truth (no. 24-25), mindful that its mission cannot be fully accomplished in the present because it extends beyond history (162). In an earlier Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope John Paul II urged the church to continue to act on behalf of and with Christ in the world (no. 21). Furthermore, the document calls on the church to stand with the poor (no. 44), and to proclaim the gospel in both words and witness of life (no. 55-56).

However, I do not draw from these abundant sources of the church's social teachings because I consider liberation theology in its strict sense as having solidarity and the 'preferential option for the poor' and the 'primacy of praxis' as its pillars. The solidarity being called for in liberation theology is not only a matter of mental disposition, but it extends to commitment of life demonstrated in concrete actions that announce and inaugurate the kingdom of God in the present. Furthermore, the conviction informing this study is that the insights of African theologians should contribute to the formation of the body of the magisterial documents, and not always the other way round. The portion of the church that comprises the clergy, and that has always determined the content and form of these documents, is thus invited to cultivate humility and to take into account theological insights of theologians from diverse spheres of the Christian faith and its mission. This way, the themes and content of ecclesiastical documents and teachings will indeed reflect the entire people of God and consequently speak relevantly to the joys and sorrows, anxieties and aspirations of the diverse African experience.

For my discussion of African liberation theology, I draw on the insights of Jean Marc Ela, a Cameroon priest who was both a sociologist and theologian. There are other African theologians in the sub-Saharan Africa, such as Laurenti Magesa, Engelbert Mveng, Eboussi Boulaga, John Mary Waliggo, who are also referred to as liberation theologians. However, their reflections take different directions. For example, Magesa's liberation theology take the ethical perspectives, while Waliggo's liberation ideas are discussed within the context of inculturation. Notwithstanding their valuable contributions to African theology, I follow the path of Ela who has been described as "the nearest Africa has come to a liberation theologian in a Latin American sense", or as "Africa's first liberation theologian of note outside South Africa", or as "one of the best known and most read African theologians not only in Africa

but also elsewhere".[8] Indeed, as pointed out by Simon Smith in the Foreword to *My Faith as an African*, Ela's reflection is a "kind of liberation theology with an African face"[9]. On the occasion of his award with honorary doctorate from the Catholic University of Louvain in 1999, he was described as "one of the most prominent and critically-committed thinkers and liberation theologians of west and central Africa.[10] Even in his attempt to bracket out Ela from of the camp of liberation theologians, Katongole cannot but wrestle with the fact that Ela extensively draws on themes, styles and metaphors that characterise liberation theology.[11] As a sociologist and theologian, Ela wrote works about a variety of themes, but in this thesis I will limit myself to his two seminal works *African Cry* and *My Faith as an African*, because these are collections of essays that arguably summarise his theological thought during his work as a missionary among the mountain people of northern Cameroon. In addition, it has been remarked that *African Cry* is one of his earliest and very influential theological work on liberation in Africa.[12] I am equally aware that there are other theological works of Ela that are only accessible in French. However, it has been argued that their content is similar to *African Cry* and *My Faith as an Africa*. Benezet Bujo remarks that even Ela's voluminous work entitled *Repenser la Théologie Africaine: Le Die Qui Libère* the content is in greater part a repetition of the issues he has already discussed in the *African Cry* and *My Faith as an African*.[13]

Although Ela wrote these theological reflections in the 1980s, they are insightfully compelling for the contemporary African situation as they were three decades ago. Not much of the socio-economic and political realities of Africa realities of Africa has changed. In fact, the World Bank statistics of September 2018 indicate that "the number of extremely poor people continues to rise in Sub-Saharan Africa, while falling rapidly in all other regions."[14]

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[8] Elia Varela Serra, "Cameroon: Africa's 'Liberation Theologian' Jean Marc Ela dies," https://globalvoices.org/2008/12/18/cameroon-africas-"liberation-theologian"-jean-marc-ela-dies/ [accessed May 20 2019].
[9] Jean Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*, trans. John Pairman and Susan Perry (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1988), ix.
[10] Jean Heijke, "Thinking in the Scene of Disaster: Theology of Jean-Marc Ela from Cameroon," *Exchange* 29, no. 1 (2000), 61.
[11] Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, 103-104.
[12] David Ngong, "The Theologian as Missionary: The Legacy of Jean Marc Ela," *Journal of Theology of Southern Africa* 136 (2010), 5.
[13] Benezet Bujo, "Jean-Marc Ela: Champion of a Theology Under the Trees," in *African Theology: The Contribution of Pioneers vol. 2* (Limuru: Kolbe Press, 2006), 185.
[14] Divyashi Wadhwa, "The Number of Extremely Poor People Continues to Rise in Sub-Saharan Africa," https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/number-extremely-poor-people-continues-rise-sub-saharan-africa [accessed May 17 2019].

On the aspect of his critical voice against the church to which he belonged, Ela's voice continues to resound with urgency today. Emmanuel Katongole, for example, finds Ela's criticisms and indictment of his own church for its foreignness and indifference to the African reality still apt and relevant for today.[15]

In the past few decades, liberation theology has been criticised. For example, by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1984 and 1986, which expressed concerns about the possible exclusivist character of the preferential option of the poor.[16] There is also a general impression among critics that liberation theology aims at deconstructing orthodox theology in order to create room for theological renewal, and that it reduces the efficacy of Jesus's salvific work within history.[17] Contrary to its critics, I will argue that liberation theology remains a relevant way of doing theology, provided it is underpinned by the Christological principle of kenosis as developed by the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar.

I will posit that using the concept of kenosis as a theological foundation for African liberation theology serves a double function. Firstly, by taking up the African situation into the theological discourse, it will treat the African realities of poverty, hunger, and social injustice with the same seriousness as questions concerning the sacraments, the Trinity, Christology, or ecclesiology. By building theology on the concept of Christ's kenosis, the church in Africa will be responding to the call of the Second Vatican Council to be open to the joys and anxieties of the world, while also finding a foundation for faith in Christology, as is suggested in *Gaudium et spes*. The 'world' of the church in Africa has distinct features that can only be effectively responded to by concrete social actions that demands simplicity, self-abasement and sacrifice, actions that could be rooted in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Secondly, kenosis unlocks the liberative potential of the gospel so that it can have a fruitful encounter with the African reality. It is only by being embedded in the reality of the African people that the gospel can demonstrate its competence and effectiveness in bringing about the positive change that Africa so desperately needs.

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[15] Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 104.

[16] *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation*, VI.5, IX.10 http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html [accessed June 20 2019]; *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, 47, 50, 66-68 http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19860322_freedom-liberation_en.html [accessed June 20 2019].

[17] Carlos R. Piar, *Jesus and Liberation: A Critical Analysis of the Christology of Latin American Liberation Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 116-117.

Balthasar's concept of kenosis can be characterised by its comprehensiveness and depth. It is comprehensive because, according to Balthasar, kenosis is not only a feature of the Son in the economic Trinity, but it *a priori* animates the intra-Trinitarian life. The Son's kenotic life is a revelation of the nature of the Godhead, according to Balthasar. Therefore, he argues that our incorporation into Christ is an invitation to a life of participation in the life of God that is itself, inherently kenotic. Furthermore, Balthasar radicalises the kenosis of the Son by envisioning his descent into hell in powerlessness to redeem the damned. His concept of kenosis could therefore be fruitful for the development of a Christological foundation for African liberation theology, because it takes the sufferings and the sacrifices involved in every genuine cause for the other as internal to the Christian vocation.

The Christological aspects of Balthasar's theological vision are central for this thesis. As a path towards holiness, Christ's kenosis it to be understood as a vocation towards the solidarity with others. On the one hand, God in Jesus Christ shares in the contingency of the human condition and of history, and on the other, he is capable of effecting salvation through Christ, because he is God. Following the example of Christ, Christians in Africa are called to get immersed in the situations of the poor and marginalised, and work to transform these situations from within. In Christ, they can respond in solidarity to those who live in the darkest circumstances. According to Balthasar, the attitude of kenotically decentring the self is fundamentally rooted in the Christian vision of life whereby an individual's true identity and destiny lies outside of the self, so that one's striving towards it defines his or her journey to holiness. Because the call to holiness is a universal offer from God, concretised in the life of Jesus Christ, kenosis as the path to attaining it can become normative to all Christians. Without prejudice to the particularity of contextual situations, the imperative values of the Christological kenosis cuts across geographical boundaries and times. Thus, in this dissertation, I will argue that Balthasar's kenotic theology, although developed in a Western European context, can be employed as a foundation for liberation theology for the African continent.

The thrust of the argument of the dissertation is that a kenotic attitude and commitment effectively could bring the liberative dynamism of the gospel into Africa's realm. My use of Balthasar's concept of kenosis as the basis and interpretative framework for liberation theology firstly concerns theological methodology. I will show that the task of theology is to have one foot in theory and another in the concrete actions of Christians in

Africa. I will therefore seek to keep the balance between theory and practice, between spirituality and social concerns. Secondly, my use of kenosis concerns Christology: Christ's self-giving as is contained in the biblical witness. I will argue that the kenotic self-limitation and sacrifice of the Son could be seen as undergirding and inspiring Christian liberative actions. Furthermore, the idea of kenosis could have a universal normative value, cutting across geographical boundaries and epochs. Lastly, I will formulate an ethical imperative for the church. According to Balthasar, God's redemptive work is as crystallised and climaxed in the kenosis of the Son, and every baptised is invited to follow in this path of self-limitation and sacrifice according to the pattern of Christ's life. Kenosis can therefore fundamentally be located at the heart of Christian vocation and mission. After presenting the different kenotic interpretations and commitments, I will advance this theological concept in view of a theology of the Christian vocation. I argue that it is the mission and duty of the church in Africa and all its members to de-centre the self and journey with the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed, answering with them their fundamental, existential and social questions, and working hand in hand with them.

By thus grounding liberation theology on the idea of Christ's kenosis, theology can avoid the temptation of reducing theological reflections to the level of fashionable debates that have little or no significance to the concrete experiences of the majority of the African people. With kenosis as a guiding principle, theology locates itself among the people whom it is concerned with. A kenotic African theology will, I will argue, sustain a balance between theory and concrete actions. In this way, theology will prove to be capable of bringing the richness or emptiness of people's experiences, and their joys and sorrows into theological reflection. This way, in a society that is characterised by a wide chasm between the minority rich and the majority poor, the church in Africa must not only identify itself with, but place itself at the service of the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalised people of Africa.

My argument for a kenotic church falls within the wider expectation made of the church in Africa. It is regarded as a powerful and credible entity with formidable leadership and highly educated, skilled and enlightened members. As an institution, the church in Africa has well-defined and competent administrative and managerial structures, and its membership is increasing rapidly. As a matter of fact, about 170 million (21%) of the population of Sub-Saharan Africans are Catholics, while the total of about 63% of the population are

Christians.[18] The temptation that comes with this kind of understanding of the church is to identify the church with power, authority and wealth, of which the influence in the organising and directing the lives of the people has to be reckoned with. As a matter of fact, the church has an enormous influence in Africa through its services of education, health care, and its works for justice, peace and reconciliation. However, I will show that the church must not lose sight of the image of Christ as a humble servant of God. For it is only in this spirit that the church and its members can have true commitment and endure self-sacrifice and suffering for the sake of the others.

The arguments of the dissertation follow a certain pattern. After a critical examination of the major aspects in the development of African theology, I will posit that 'liberation' has been the kernel of its trajectories and has been given an expressive thrust in liberation theology as articulated by Jean Marc Ela. As a sociologist and a theologian, fully embedded in the everyday life of the people, Ela lucidly presents the socio-economic and political situation of the African people and compellingly urges the church to retrieve the liberative dynamics inherent in the gospel to focus on a holistic liberation of the African people. I will take his argument further by opting for a theology that is based and permeated by the kenotic form of Christ as espoused by Balthasar. Balthasar argues that the life of Christ is pervaded by kenosis, and thus gives us an insight into the intra-Trinitarian life and consequently compels us to a life of participation in it. While arguing for the kenotic theology to buttress African liberation theology, I do not uncritically endorse the entirety of Balthasar's theology nor of his kenotic theology. Because they are related to the major thrust of the research, the dissertation will also indirectly draw attention to matters pertinent to the ongoing reception of the theology of Balthasar.

My choice of Balthasar to complement and critique African liberation theology, as it is elucidated by Jean Marc Ela is not arbitrary. Balthasar and Ela are both influential twentieth-century theologians. Both were creative in their contexts and abandoned traditional mainstream theology in order to be relevant to the questions of their own time. Balthasar distanced himself from neo-Thomistic theological tradition and constructed a highly original theological aesthetics and a theodramatic theology, while Ela on his part abandoned the traditional theological methodology and developed a "theology under the tree" method by

[18] Caryle Murphy, "In Africa, Pope Francis will find Religious Vibrancy and Violence," https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/24/in-africa-pope-francis-will-find-religious-vibrancy-and-violence/ [accessed May 27 2019]

which he reflected on the Word of God with the people so that together they would, under its illumination, rediscover themselves. Ela's presumption is that if God has spoken in history, he must have a pronouncement over the reality in which he encounters the African people.[19] Both theologians moved away from the hegemony of Neo-Scholasticism with its over systematisation of theological doctrines. Both theologians also reflected on the reality of their time from within the church with the conviction that the church has a mission to the whole world. They thus became critical of the church for its inattentiveness to the reality and changing circumstances of their time. They insisted that the church must not close itself to its inner security and privileges but must constantly seek to fulfil its mission in the world. However, Ela takes for granted the agility of the church in the world and so he does not refer to the necessary link that exists between the church and Christ. This tendency could easily result in the temptation to claim credit for itself as historical institution or community of people; and to correlate the world ideals with the kingdom of God. On the contrary, Balthasar is keen to relate the church to its eschatological dimension and urges that the latter should in fact determine the former. This self-understanding of the church then makes it to be constantly aware of its pilgrim nature and that its animating power and mandate ultimately lie beyond its present form and status and is evoked in prayers and adoration of God.

Research question

In search for a relevant and fruitful framework for African theology, the question informing and guiding this dissertation is, "Can the kenotic theology of Balthasar be a hermeneutical key for understanding and grounding the liberative potential of African liberation theology?" The hypothetical answer to this question is that this is indeed the case. A liberation theology that is built on kenosis will be able to take seriously both the message of the gospel and the situation of the poor in Africa. Admittedly, the subject of liberation is not lacking in the different trajectories of African theology, nor in African ecclesial documents. In fact, the question of social justice, peace, reconciliation and human flourishing abounds in many theological works and ecclesiastical documents across Africa. However, or because of this, there is an urgent need to rethink the path of African theology and search for a theological framework that is capable of evoking the liberative potential of the gospel in Africa. Aware of the criticisms against liberation theology, but not because I necessarily subscribe to them, I

[19] Ela, *My Faith as an African*, 179-180.

will argue that by grounding liberation theology on the Christological principle of kenosis, these criticisms could be responded to.

Structure of the thesis

In brief, the structure of this thesis is as follows. In order to map the field of African liberation theology, I will consider it important to retrieve the liberative dynamism in African theology by tracing its origins to Latin American liberation theology and its influence on the political and theological movements in Africa. Furthermore, I will discuss the historical development of African theology after the Second Vatican Council. A presentation of the branches and trajectories of African theology will help to conceptually frame and clarify what I precisely mean by "African liberation theology". After having introduced African liberation theology, I will consider in some depth the theology of kenosis, with a particular interest in its historical development in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and the different positions in the debates on the subject. I will postulate that Balthasar's theology contains the central aspects of kenosis that I will put forward for a dialogue with African liberation theology. The argument I will develop is that, although Balthasar is far from being regarded as a liberation theologian, his kenotic Christology can offer a doctrinal foundation for the task and content of African liberation theology.

The dissertation is composed of five chapters. The aim of the first chapter is to introduce the main aspects of African liberation theology. Firstly, before getting into the heart of the matter, some clarifications of the controversial concept 'Africa' and the expression of "African theology" will be made. Then I will introduce Latin American liberation theology as a main source of influence for African liberation theology. It has informed the conceptual framework and method of African liberation theology. Based on this inspiration from Latin American theology, I will articulate that African liberation theologians started to relate the gospel with social concerns in a new way. Secondly, I will connect the developments of African liberation theology with certain dominant political and theological movements across the African continent. I will thus show that the emergence of African liberation theology was partly influenced by the political movements agitating for the independence of African nation states. In addition, I will demonstrate that African liberation theology can be found in the theological movements of adaptation, indigenisation and inculturation, which demanded the Africanisation of the churches and theology in Africa. Next, I will make distinctions between the different orientations of African liberation theology, ranging from Black theology in

South Africa to feminist and evangelical liberation theology. This section helps in highlighting the differences of these trajectories with African liberation theology. In order to describe African liberation theology, I have chosen its most influential example: the thought of Jean Marc Ela. Ela contends in his influential works that the gospel has an innate force that still needs to be unlocked so that it can evoke its liberative thrust in the encounter with the African people as they are embedded in their social realities. After having introduced the background, the aspects and the development of African liberation theology, I will sketch the problem that I would like to address in the rest of the thesis.

The second chapter will present the central themes and positions in the theology of kenosis. It is aimed at providing a background to Balthasar's kenotic theology (in chapter three). The chapter clarifies the fact that Balthasar's interest in kenotic theology needs to be understood in the context of an ongoing debate amongst various theologians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In addition, it enables us to acquire some insight into the points of departure or agreement of Balthasar with the prevailing kenotic views in modern theology. Furthermore, it helps to understand the claim that Balthasar's kenotic theology can critically contribute to the further development of liberation theology in Africa.

In the third chapter, I will then discuss the kenotic theology of Balthasar. This chapter is central to the thesis, because in it I will discuss his idea of kenosis as a resource for undergirding African liberation theology. The chapter begins with an introduction to Balthasar's life and his theology. It will become clear that kenosis is central to his Christology. Thus, it inspires, grounds and guides the course of Balthasar's theological vision. I will describe his view of kenosis in the inter-Trinitarian life and will then analyse how this according to him is related to contingent human freedom. This will prove to be important for making the connection between Christ's kenosis and the human efforts towards liberation. And holding on to the Christological kenotic scheme, I will demonstrate how Balthasar perceives kenosis as having a foundational impact on the task of both the church and the Christian vocation and witness.

In the fourth chapter, the two conceptual poles, kenosis and liberation are interfaced and set into an interactive conversation. What seem to be parallel and opposed concepts, will now be represented as mutually supportive ones, thus offering the possibility for a kenotic liberation theology which is discussed in the next chapter. In order for the gospel's transforming power to have a bearing on people's life, it must be brought into contact with

the kenotic reality of the people. In return, the liberative dynamism of the gospel that, I will claim, results from kenotic movement towards the other, authenticates and legitimises the liberative endeavours of the church and its members. After giving a brief overview of the two theological coordinates, an effort will be made to bridge the apparent chasm between Balthasar's kenotic theology and African liberation theology, by posing a provocative question as to whether Balthasar could to any degree be regarded as a liberation theologian. The attempt to answer this question spurs discussion of Balthasar's critical appraisal of liberation theology as found in his articles "Liberation Theology in the Light of Salvation History," and in "Dramatic Dimension of Liberation," which is a section in *Theo-Drama* IV. In these works, Balthasar joined the critics of liberation theology at the Vatican and the general feeling within certain circles of the time by voicing his own criticism of and opposition to many aspects of liberation theology. After confronting his critical stance toward liberation theology with the liberation ideas of Jean Marc Ela, and while keeping his criticism within his wider theological framework and vision, I will explore the opportunities for a kenotic liberation theology, with kenosis as the catalysing force of liberation., After arriving at this opportunity, I will explore the possibility of constructing a kenotic-liberation theology for Christian vocation and mission.

The fifth chapter then is the synthesis of all the discussions that have constituted the dissertation. It will argue for the hypothesis I have set out to pursue. I will conclude that it is possible to bring together the two concepts not merely by juxtaposition, but also by a fruitful interaction that is mutually enriching for critique and exchange. This last chapter begins with positing a dramatic incongruence of the presence of the gospel in Africa on the one hand and the prevailing social reality on the other. The inevitable question of the role of theology in Africa's social realities will then be raised, thus necessitating the urgency for a new accentuation of the gospel message for the African context.

Method

The methodology used in this dissertation consists of a critical review of related literature. Based on this review, I will relate Christian concepts to existential and political situations. By presenting a critical evaluation of the sources, I will be able to find points and areas of both convergence and divergence between the kenotic theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar and African liberation theology. In order to arrive at the possibility of constructing a kenotic African liberation theology, a careful analysis of the conceptual propositions, each on their

own terms, has been made before bringing them into an interactive discussion. Since the aim of bringing these theological traditions together is not to arrive at closed-ended conclusions, I have endeavoured to tease out theological potentials from mainly Balthasar's kenotic theology for the enrichment of African liberation theology.

In this research, I have integrated different methods and developments in theology, ranging from common sense and intuition to the hermeneutical use of scripture and tradition. The kenotic model of theology demands a return and retrieval of the image of Jesus Christ as it is presented in the scriptures and in the living tradition of the church. Without prejudice to the doctrinal formulations of Christology, the employed epistemology is relational. Before ascertaining the suitability of the central concepts and categories, I have clarified them and presented them against the background of their historical development and their contemporary understanding and application. I have argued that the kenosis of Christ is foundational for Christian life, and the interpretative framework it provides could be viewed as a permanent point of reference for African liberation theology. While asserting the centrality of the image of Christ in African liberation theology, the mission theology of "the salvation of souls" with no attention to the flourishing of the human subject, will argued against.

My task has not been to undertake a programmatic work for the necessity of Christian missionary works in Africa. Instead, I have argued for the efficacy and relevance of the gospel's message in the historical and social realities of Africans. This is a critical exercise and to arrive at a balanced and academic position, I have maintained a critical distance, avoiding a certain bias. However, as a researcher from Africa, despite my restraint from bias, I have brought my experience in play in the thesis. This explains, in part, the normative priorities I have set for myself, the choices I have made, the principles to emphasize and the styles of presentation.

CHAPTER ONE

AFRICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND ITS CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to introduce and discuss African liberation theology that will be further discussed in chapter four and five of the dissertation. Because African liberation theology cannot stand on its own, its roots and linkages will be accounted for. Firstly, considering the fact that African liberation theology received its inspiration from Latin American liberation theology, I consider it significant to briefly treat and show how and in what ways it influenced the development and shift of emphasis in African theology. Moreover, African liberation theology shares a similar dose of challenges and opposition of its counterpart Latin American liberation theology. Secondly, I will consider the historical development of African theology and the problematics involved with its definitions, and the insufficiencies of the emphases of adaptation and inculturation theologies. Thirdly, I will introduce briefly the different trends in African liberation theology before narrowing our attention on liberation theology as it is propounded by theologians from the Catholic Church's tradition. The catholic ideas on liberation theology will then be illustrated with the works of Jean-Marc Ela who is arguable regarded to as an African liberation theologian on similar footing with Latin American liberation theologians. I will establish that throughout the various stages of the development, the element of liberation has always formed the kernel and living force of African theology.

1. BEGINNINGS IN LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

1.1. THE RISE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The concept of "liberation theology" was first introduced by Gustavo Gutiérrez in 1969 in the context of the meeting of Latin American theologians that had convened in Campine, Switzerland under the auspices of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to deliberate on theology, Church and socio-economic development.[1] The key tenets of the innovative theological thinking arising in significant measure from these deliberations were enunciated

[1] Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 21.

by Gutiérrez in his seminal text, *A Theology of Liberation,* published in 1971. It is important to point out that liberation theology did not emerge in a vacuum but was an outcome of the growing recognition in the 1950s and 1960s of the widespread poverty and social injustice in Latin America. The moral reaction against socio-economic and political situations of colonisation, subjugation, oppression and marginalisation highlighted the need for fresh outcomes from theological reflection. Liberation theology was therefore born in a context where people tried to make sense of their Christian faith as they struggled to liberate their society from the claws of socio-economic and political evils. Given this backdrop, it must be conceded that although Gutiérrez is credited with coining the term, 'liberation theology' and with being one of the principal founders of the movement in Latin America, to a significant degree he was inspired and motivated by forerunners who had raised their voices in protest about and in opposition to the miserable living conditions to which the Latin American poor were subjected. Outstanding among those who vigorously championed the cause of the oppressed and marginalised of Latin America were the Mexican bishop Bartolome de la Casas, the Chilean bishop Diego Medellin, and the Peruvian bishop Antonio San Miguel.[2] These and other voices in the "New Christendom"[3] confronted the unjust authority and oppressive systems, and initiated various programs for raising the social awareness of the people, for the alleviation of the suffering of the grassroots poor, and for the development of their skills and potential.

Another factor favouring the emergence of liberation theology was the Second Vatican Council with its antecedent and post conciliar meetings and movements. Specifically, the call to rethink the place and relevancy of the Christian faith in relation to the world inspired the church in Latin America to renounce its privileged position as an ally of the establishment in order to be attentive to and journey with the suffering masses in their existential conditions and aspirations. Remarkably, the Latin American Bishops Conference held between 24th August to 6th September 1968 at Medellin provided a decisive basis on which liberation theology could legitimately flourish – for the bishops asked themselves: how can the gospel

[2] Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory,* 12-15.
[3] "New Christendom" is used to refer to the strategy that the Catholic church in Latin America had to adopt in the mid decades of twentieth century in order to make Catholicism a determinant force in the social and cultural transformation of Latin America. It integrated modern scientific methods and approaches into the church's pastoral programs and placed the church in the forefront of the struggle for emancipation, empowerment and development of the poor people of Latin America.

of Christ's salvation be presented in an intelligible way to suffering and oppressed people?[4] The answer they found was in liberation theology.

1.2. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK OF THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

Liberation theology has been defined as the reflection on action, so that 'actions of liberation' come first in importance and chronology.[5] Liberation theologians contend that there should be a constant relationship between action and thought as theology – a reflective activity – since reflection is not possible without preceding action. Liberation theology therefore sustains an intimate relationship between theory and practice as opposed to the traditional theology's conception where theory guides and governs practice. Liberation theologians believe in a hermeneutic cycle in which truth can be found in the concrete history of men, and this truth is then reflected upon to, in turn, inform and strengthen the action that unleashed it. Because the liberation movements arise out of diverse contexts and situations – generating different actions - we cannot talk of homogenous liberation theology but liberation theologies. Nonetheless, there is acknowledged a unifying kernel of all liberation theologies, namely, the urgency to build here and now in the temporal sphere, the kingdom of God. And the crucial task for the realisation of this is the liberation of the marginalised, in particular the poor, who therefore become the point on which all liberation theologies converge.[6] Before we consider the poor, I will briefly analyse the conception of salvation history from the viewpoint of liberation theology.

a) Liberation theology does not limit itself in either focus or content to spiritual concerns but takes seriously the integral wellbeing of the human person. To argue for such holistic liberation, Latin American liberation theologians had to reflect on and borrow from the instruments and data of social sciences. At the time, they found in the Marxist's social analysis – the dialectical and historico-structural – the most apt tool that would explain the social world and serve to achieve human possibilities.[7]

A distinctive innovation that is associated with liberation theology is the conception of the inherent relationships between sin, poverty and social wellbeing. Liberation theology's

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[4] Peter Hebblethwaite, "Liberation Theology and the Roman Catholic Church," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology,* ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2007), 179.
[5] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973), 307.
[6] Leonardo Boff and Clodivis Boff, *Salvation and Liberation: In Search of Balance between Faith and Politics* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 24.
[7] Jose Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1975), 97-98.

discourse on sin is not limited to the inwardly personal disposition of an individual, but extends to supra-personal dynamics: the relationships one has with other individual persons, the society and nature. A general agreement by liberation theologians is that although social sin generally arises from personal sin, the former nonetheless has the capacity to arise spontaneously and can readily mutate into personal sin, thus creating chains or circles of sins both personal and structural.[8] According to liberation theologians, Jesus Christ is the inaugurator of the kingdom; a spiritual, political and revolutionary leader who in order to establish the reign of God reacts against the evil forces of oppression, injustice and poverty, thereby offering liberation to the poor and the afflicted. Jesus Christ therefore effectively addresses himself and his message of the kingdom not only to individuals, but also to structures of communities and societies since all can contribute either for good or bad to the integral wellbeing of the individual person. The kingdom of God is not only something to be anticipated in the other worldly. Rather it should be sought here and now – a kingdom of peace, justice, relief for the poor and oppressed. The kingdom is to be looked for not only in the beyond, but it is this world transformed. Thus liberation theology endorses liberative actions in this world in the pattern and continuation of Jesus' public ministry that brought him face to face with the unjust and oppressive establishment of his time.[9]

Liberation theology departs from the dualistic view of history in Christian theology and establishes that sacred and world histories cannot be separated. It collapses the distinction between the two histories while at the same time admitting that the two are not synonymous. In this way, the building of human history and civilisation becomes the realisation of God's saving process that addresses and takes up the human person integrally,[10] based and guided by the virtues of love, friendship, justice, peace, selflessness. It is only in this way, liberation theologians are convinced, that any Christian reflection and undertaking can be faithful to the incarnational pattern.[11]

b). As already noted in passing, the option for the poor forms the converging locus of liberation theologies. Leonardo Boff and Clodivis Boff have emphatically articulated it thus, "to pretend to discuss liberation theology without reference to the poor is to miss the whole point, one fails to see the central problem of the theology being discussed. For the kernel and

[8] Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 34-36.
[9] Gutierrez, *The Theology of Liberation*, p. 22-29.
[10] Ibid., 160.
[11] Juan Luis Segundo, *A Theology of Artisans of a new Humanity: The Community called Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 1974), 26.

core of liberation theology is not the theology, but liberation".[12] Liberation theologians constantly call on the church to take the side of the poor in their struggle against the domination of the rich and powerful.[13] Accordingly, the church in Latin America is urged not only to implement measures to counter official injustice and oppression that provokes tensions inherent in exacerbated class distinctions, but to join hands with the poor in their revolutionary struggle to extricate themselves from oppressive systems imposed by the privileged minority. Because of a common commitment to the cause of the poor, their preferential treatment is said to form the uniting point for the church. In this regard, liberation theology does not in any way contravene the unity of the church, but it in fact solidifies, strengthens and concretises it.[14] The option for the poor is the common ground of all the church's activities. It is upheld that, (liberation) theologians and the poor ought to be mutually interactive. As the church evangelises the poor, it must allow itself to be evangelised by the poor who are the crucified people of God.[15] Furthermore, the option for the poor is not only realised theoretically through "preaching, celebration, ritualization and popular dramatization".[16] Such good and pious elements must be accompanied and translated into actions – liberative actions.

The result of these liberative actions enunciated by liberation theology is the envisioning of a new man and a new society that will be free from poverty, injustice, oppression and forces of evil that enslave the human person. This is not a matter of a reform of the structures of the existing system. Rather, it is the construction of a new society with qualitatively different structures and systems. To keep equal emphasis on societal and personal dimensions of liberation, liberation theologians are convinced that the revolutionary exercise at the structural level goes simultaneously with the inner human transformation of the human person.

In the final analysis, liberation theology gives a unique way of approaching theology. It directs theological reflection away from the traditional directions and emphases of global north theology that enjoys protection and privilege among the philosophers, educated, wealthy, racially dominant classes of people – who form a relatively small section of the

[12] Leonardo Boff and Clodivis Boff, *Liberation Theology: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 11.
[13] Leonardo Boff, *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 115.
[14] Gutierrez, *The Theology of Liberation*, 276-78.
[15] Smith, *Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 44.
[16] Ibid., 45.

population. In effect, liberation theology attaches lesser importance to those dimensions of traditional theological concepts that are rather idealised and abstract, while it seeks to emphasise liberating socioeconomic and political aspects. It is important to appreciate that liberation theologians are sensitive to their own context of massive poverty caused by colonisation and neo-colonisation policies, aggressive profit-oriented activities of multi-national corporations and businesses in alliance with oppressive regimes of Latin American countries.

Accordingly, liberation theology in Latin America generated a movement that actively sought to eliminate the immediate causes of poverty and injustice, to improve the capacity of the poor to achieve their human potential, and to liberate the individual and society in general from selfishness and sin. Such goals were relevant to scenarios radically different from those of North American and European modern and post-modern crises of Christian faith of the time, particularly following the world wars and the Jewish holocaust. Consequently, the much discussed themes of theodicy, secularisation, detraditionalization, relativism and others that tend to dominate theological debates in Western Europe and North America do not pose a level of threat that would merit a substantial place for them in theological debates in Latin America and the Third World contexts.

1.3. CRITICISMS AND OPPOSITION

Many critical voices have been raised against liberation theology from both within and outside the church. Because they condemned officially sponsored oppression of the poor and marginalised, and championed their cause, many liberation theologians were persecuted, arrested, imprisoned and killed by the states and governments on the pretext that they were supporting and disseminating Marxist ideology.[17] From 1973 onwards, with the change in civilian governments and subsequent takeovers by military governments, for example in Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, Peru, Ecuador and Argentina, the church was severely persecuted. Priests, religious and other church leaders were arrested, tortured exiled and killed. This was a period when official hostility towards the church was acute.

Because of the aggressive attitude of governments many bishops and church authorities started to distance themselves from the views of liberation theologians. This was particularly

[17] Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 247-48. The established governments interpreted liberation theology's call to pervasive action as an echo of Marxist's insights where man's condition is being determined exclusively by historical circumstances.

evident in the changed attitude of Consejo Episcopal Latino Americano (CEALM), the council that was the administrative and executive arm of the conference of the Latin American bishops. At a conference in Sucre in 1972 leading figure*s* critical of or even unsympathetic to the ideas of liberation theology were elected to key positions in CELAM. As a result liberation theology suffered a great setback.[18]

Within the wider church also, serious critical voices were raised against liberation theology. It was argued that it taught truth based on human reasoning and experience not truth that comes from God. In addition, they affirmed that it deviated from the origin of God's truth – scripture and tradition - which, despite the claims of liberationists, are not conditioned by socio-economic and political situations.[19] Furthermore, the critics argued that liberation theology undermines sound ecclesiology when it makes distinction between institutional church and the church that springs from the concerns of the poor. What therefore needed to be upheld, it was maintained, is that the primary focus of the church should be, first and foremost, the communion of believers of Christ and not primarily its response to political situations. Critics saw in liberation theology a tendency to fragment the solid unity of the church by ideological presuppositions that underline it and undermine the unity of particular churches with the bishop of Rome.[20]

In addition to the critiques and opposition from within Latin America, liberation theology was also closely questioned by the Holy See. In the 1980s, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued two Instructions critical of aspects of liberation theology. The 1984 *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation* attacked liberation theology because of what Cardinal Ratzinger, the then Prefect of the Congregation, referred to as its use of Marxist's concepts "in an insufficiently critical manner". The instruction does not admit of any points of agreement between Marxist and other assessments of the socio-political world. It insists that once one opts for some concepts from a particular school of thought one is led to accept the rest of its concepts as well. From this viewpoint, acceptance of some elements of Marxist thought commits a person to the view that class struggle determines everything, and a materialistic ideology becomes the denominator for life's

[18] Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 22.
[19] Peter Hebblethwaite, "Liberation Theology and the Roman Catholic Church," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, 182-183.
[20] Ibid., 184.

struggles and aspirations.[21] According to Ratzinger, those scholars are in error who categorise Marxism as scientific knowledge that is worth determining human life's fundamental relationships and orientations. Rather, he judges them to be simply unverified assumptions claiming to be guiding principles that threaten to replace the enduring gift of God's Word.[22]

In the 1986 *Instruction on Christian Liberation and Freedom*, the CDF, although acknowledging and accepting particular socio-political situations as starting points for theological reflection, nonetheless stressed that the context must always be interpreted in the light of scripture and of the church's experience.[23] The CDF was alert and concerned that certain destructive and poisonous trends within atheistic Marxism that deny God a space in his creation and in the affairs of men may infiltrate the church. The CDF saw any attempt to displace God from his creation as threatening to prove tragic for mankind and for the future of humanity. Whilst acknowledging these warnings, I do not in any way succumb to them as being legitimate accusations against liberation theology. Having awareness of them however is important to anyone who undertakes a study of liberation theology. But because it is not within the aim of this study to undertake such a task, I do not consider the Marxist-liberation theology's critique and counter critiques to deserve a place within the scope of this dissertation.[24]

Considering the immense weight of opposition and suppression liberation theology faced from within and outside the church, and how the effect of this was exacerbated by the fall of the Berlin wall and the triumph of capitalism over socialism, it was judged to be virtually moribund in the 1980s and 90s.[25] In that period, although it tended to confine itself to academic discourse, the amount of publications on liberation theology significantly decreased, and the grassroots communities didn't multiply as had been anticipated and consequently it had minor practical influence on the ordinary life of the people. Ivan Petrella has lamented the neglect of historical projects – that gave promise of impacting positively on

[21] Peter Hebblethwaite, "Liberation Theology and the Roman Catholic Church," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology,* 189.
[22] Instruction on Certain Aspects of Liberation Theology, 1984, no. VII, 12; IX, 2: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html [accessed February 18 2018].
[23] Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, 1986, para no. 70: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19860322_freedom-liberation_en.html [accessed February 18 2018].
[24] For Liberation Theology-Marxist's critique and counter-critique cf. John Pottenger, *The Political Theory of Liberation Theology: Towards a Re-convergence of Social Values and Social Science* (New York: State University Press, 1989), 64-98.
[25] Anthony Gill, "The Study of Liberation Theology: What Next?," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42 no. 1 (2002), 87-88.

socio-economic and political life of the society - and the disproportionate emphasis on theory during those years.[26]

1.4. THE ACHIEVEMENT OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The 1968 Medellin Conference of the Latin American Bishops was perceived as giving the impetus of official endorsement to the liberation theology movement. However, it has been remarked that the progress came about not so much from the content of the document as from the great commitment and hard work of liberation theologians in promoting the implementation of the principles of Liberation theology. Outstanding people in this regard included Ivan Illich, Gustavo Gutierrez, Juan Luis Segundo, Segundo Galilea, and Lucio Gera. It is worth noting that only a relatively small part of the document was explicitly Liberation theology in character just as a similarly small portion could be considered conservative. Accordingly, the greatest part of the document was open to a variety of interpretations.[27] In the main, the success of liberation theology can be said to be attributed to the ingenuity and arduous endeavours of liberation theologians. They took advantage of and exploited the ambiguities in the document to interpret them in light of the principles of liberation theology and proposed these as the pastoral strategy for the Latin American church. The theologians' hard work during the honeymoon years – 1968-1972 – and the perseverance through the years of persecution and hardships, earned liberation theologians an enduring place in both the church and the society. Their ideas were spread out to grass root levels through the Basic Christian Communities (BCC). As a result, the Medellin Conference has generally been categorised as liberationist.[28]

One outcome was that in the first instance liberation theologians prevailed over moderate and conservative bishops. But at the Sucre Conference (1972) the latter decided to withdraw their support for liberation theology and took necessary steps in that direction by re-structuring CELAM and dissolving the institutions that acted as its think tank. Subsequently, the radical and progressive pastoral activities of the church led to her being subjected to increasingly brutal attacks by repressive governments. This active hostility prompted bishops and other church leaders to reverse their negative attitude in relation to liberation theologians, focusing instead on countering external aggression directed against the protection and unity

[26] Ivan Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology: An Argument and Manifesto* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 7.
[27] Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 165-167.
[28] Ibid., 168.

of church members, including liberation theologians. In addition, the increased repression earned liberation theology sympathy and publicity and bolstered support not only from within the church, but also from the general public and beyond Latin America.[29]

Notwithstanding the protection from external aggression that the church hierarchy was obliged to offer to liberation theologians in difficult times, in the aftermath of the 1972 conference at Sucre, the administrative and organisational programs of CELAM stopped resourcing liberation theology. Because of this move, liberation theologians had to secure the means of sustaining their liberation activities from other sources. While continuing to offer their normal services within the church, in order to spread their views, they continued to use existing periodicals, founded their own journals, established research training institutes, and were sometimes offered accommodation for their activities within organisational infrastructures of religious orders. They also established internal networks overseas and organised international conferences on liberation theology attended by theologians from all over the world under the organisation umbrella of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. These conferences drew together theologians from Latin America, North America, Asia, Europe and Africa. Further, they received funding from foreign agencies such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the National Council of Churches (USA).[30]

All these factors combined to give liberation theology a solid measure of acceptance in the church, in Latin American society and beyond. This strong level of positive recognition facilitated its spread to the rest of the world. After the initial organisation in Mexico, the conferences on liberation theology were extended to Tanzania, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Brazil and India. The spread of liberation theology to other Third World countries gave Latin American liberation theologians a sense of common and united mission for which they were prepared to even sacrifice their lives. Although liberation theologians from Asia and Africa articulated their own context, the theological ideas and stand point they espoused were all inspired by the principles of liberation theology. Before shifting our focus to the African (liberation) theology, we shall briefly reflect on how the Latin American form of liberation theology may need to respond in the future.

1.5. THE FUTURE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY: ITS CURRENT STATUS

[29] Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 192-196.
[30] Ibid., 205-206.

Up to the close of the twentieth century, the future of Latin American liberation theology was uncertain. While remaining demonstrably resilient and confident liberation theologians had to confront a situation in which socio-political situations that had incited the rise of liberation theology were becoming less prevalent. On the one hand, the Latin American democracies seemed to be on a sustainable footing and the economic condition of the poor was steadily improving. With a continuation of such conditions the clearly obvious relevance of liberation theology would diminish and the widespread interest in it could wane considerably. On the other hand, however, there remained the possibility of a return to military repression and to the former oppressive system. In circumstances of this kind liberation theology would continue to offer a valued hermeneutical framework for the church.[31] Moreover, faced with the increasingly vigorous missionary activity of protestant churches liberation theology could prove a powerful agent in maintaining and strengthening the religious faith and practice of Catholics.[32]

From the year 2000 onwards, liberation theology has re-emerged with new and broad perspectives. The contemporary crises such as neo-colonisation and globalisation, questions of gender inequality, marginalisation of the minority groups, and the massive movements of immigrants and refugees across borders of nations and continents are all pertinent to major concerns of liberation theologians. In all these situations, wealth and resources are concentrated in the hands of a privileged minority while huge numbers of people languish in misery and take risky ventures seeking better opportunities for improving their lives.[33] In 2006, prompted by situations such as these, a group of liberation theologians from different continents committed to various strands of liberation theologies started coming together under the leadership of Marcella Althaus Reid, Ivan Petrella and Thia Cooper. This group held conferences and meetings to revive and disseminate ideas of liberation theology and make it regain prominence in the church, academia and society in this century. The themes of common interest addressed by this new generation of liberation theologians include: socio-economic and political injustice, oppression and marginalisation of the poor and

[31] Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 232.
[32] Penny Lernoux, *People of God: The Struggle for World Catholicism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 153-164.
[33] Craig L. Nessan, *The Vitality of Liberation Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 146.

disadvantaged, speaking out for voiceless communities, and the common stewardship of creation against the notion of private ownership and individualism.[34]

Petrella succinctly outlines three projects arising from the re-emergence of liberation theology. Firstly, re-asserting core ideas, whereby liberation theologians endeavour to disentangle and filter out liberation theology's principles and ideas - the unchangeable core elements such as the reign of God and the preferential option for the poor are upheld as being fundamental. These leitmotifs are differentiated from particular interventions or historical projects which are mutable. Secondly, revising basic categories, whereby the life of the group or community is given preference over that of the individual. The concept of the poor is understood as "ordinary people" and not "unified communities" or intentionally classified as poor people who are revolutionary subjects. As a consequence, the poor do not necessarily need a political categorisation in order to offer resistance to oppression and subjugation. However, the grass root communities in alliance with cross-social and cultural groupings – indigenous people, ecological activists, women, under privileged, oppressed – wake up and make demand for their rights bound together by faith and brotherhood. Thirdly, liberation theologians have been intent on demonstrating that the forces emanating from the idolatrous character of socialism and capitalism are anti-life. At the same time they have argued that the God who inspires and leads people and the course of history is the guarantor of abundant life.[35] On the whole, liberation theology's perspectives have continued to be of influence and have thus informed and also influenced magisterial documents, particularly the option for the poor. Its fundamental tenets pervade the constitutions of organisations, popular movements and the life of the church.[36]

With the papacy of Francis, many believe that liberation theology is once again re-emerging as a valued theological hermeneutic in catholic theology. The pope's anti-capitalist pronouncements especially in *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudatio Sii* make him appear to be at home with liberation theology, and therefore his papacy could be a moment for the revitalisation of its principles. Moreover, the pope's consistent emphasis on the need to care for the poor and the earth re-echoes liberation theology's principle of preferential option for

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[34] Thia Copper, "Introduction," in *The Reemergence of liberation theology: Models for Twenty First Century*, ed. Thia Copper, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 5-7.
[35] Copper, "Introduction," in *The Reemergence of Liberation Theology*, 5-7.
[36] Christopher Rowland, "Introduction: The Theology of Liberation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9; Ibid., 248-249.

the poor. This uncompromising stance of the pope makes him seem a revolutionary who does not hesitate to advocate for change – radical transformation – so that the poor can have fresh opportunity to access decent lives. In his address to activists in Bolivia, the pope exhorted them: "we want change, real change, structural change. This system is now intolerable."[37] In addition to these pronouncements, the Vatican has taken actions that suggest a new appreciation of liberation theology. Of significance is the invitation to Gustavo Gutiérrez to participate as a guest theologian at the meeting of Caritas Internationalis in Rome between May 12-17 2015. It has been interpreted by some as a welcome gesture that could open a new platform within the universal church to liberation theology. Lastly, the canonisation of archbishop Oscar Romero is being hailed as the church's acknowledgement and commendation of the selfless sacrifice that liberation theology evokes in the members of the church.

From the foregoing discussions, I have shown the development and the challenges of Latin American liberation theology. It has become evident by now that as liberation theology came to the point of losing steam in Latin America, it was urgently demanded in Africa. African liberation theology was inspired by Latin American liberation theology in both the analytical technique[38] and the need to relate the gospel to the socio-economic and political reality of the African people. In what follows, I will be discussing African liberation theology, after unpacking the complexities involved when talking of African liberation theology and African theology in general.

2. AFRICAN THEOLOGY

2.1. AFRICAN THEOLOGY OR THEOLOGIES?

It is problematic to frame African theology because of the complexities that are inherent in the generic term 'Africa' or the epithet 'African'.[39] Africa is a vast continent comprising 54 countries with diverse climate and ethnic groupings with different religious traditions, varying colonial experiences and levels of development. Because of this diversity, it is

[37] Liberation Theology, one reviled by church, now embraced by pope, http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/9/22/pope-embraces-liberation-theology.html accessed January 12 2018.
[38] Emmanuel Wabanhu, "Exploring the Ground of Doing Theology in Africa," in *The Shifting Ground of Doing Theology: Perspectives from Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2017), 35.
[39] J.N.K Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1989), 3.

difficult to talk of one African theology and it has therefore been argued that we can only speak of "African theologies".

Nonetheless, despite these diversities of outlook on Africa, it is not only possible but more reasonable to talk of African theology. Africa is homogenous in a number of ways. J.N.K Mugambi outlines three features that to a significant degree make Africa homogenous: Firstly, family and kinship play an important role in decision-making in the African setting. Secondly, despite the increasing urbanisation in Africa, most indigenous Africans associate themselves with their rural social relationships. Thirdly, the African continent has a shared experience of poverty, oppression and economic and political exploitation.[40] Because the life of the African people is characterised by these unique experiences, there can only be one African theology when they try to make meaning of the Christian message to their own existential situations. In a similar way, Emmanuel Martey, posits pauperization as the commonly shared reality in the whole of the African continent. Africans are poor or are rather made poor or deprived of basic means of living by forces of structures imposed on them. Even when trying to bridge the difference between 'Africanisation' and 'liberation', he succinctly writes that:

> The struggle against the anthropological pauperization of the African person is what gives Africa its theological agenda. It is indeed the pivot of on which all relevant African theological interpretations and methodological considerations must rotate. Contextually, any attempt at giving theological interpretation to this agenda must wrestle with the two interpreting dimensions of African reality, and any God-talk in sub-Saharan Africa must be done in the light of these undying dimensions of African theological reality.[41]

2.2. DEFINITION

The term 'African theology' is generally considered – at least by major Christian organisation such as World Council of Churches (WCC), All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), and the National Council of Christian Churches – as African Christian theology. Otherwise the phrase 'African theology' could as well apply to African Religious Tradition or any non-Christian African theology.[42] In this dissertation, African theology will consistently mean the

[40] Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5-6.
[41] Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 37-38;
[42] Mugambi, *African Christian Theology*, 9-10.

former and not the latter. Before I get further, I would like to have a cursory look at some definitions that have been given to 'African theology'.

According to John Mbiti, African theology is a "theological reflection and expression by African Christians".[43] Pobee defines African theology as "theological reflection that emanates from and speaks to the African situation".[44] According to John Kurewa it is the "study that seeks to reflect upon and express the Christian faith in African thought-forms and idioms as it is experienced in African Christian communities, and always in dialogue with the rest of Christendom".[45] African theology has also been defined as a "theology born out of the African experience, African vision of the world and metaphysics, and takes seriously the cultures of the people of Africa".[46] From these definitions, it can be gathered that African theology is a reaction to a certain foreign character and elements that have coloured the forms of Christian religious faith and practice that have been introduced and established in African Christianity. African theology responds to the demand to seriously incorporate into theological discourse the cultural aspects and contextual situations of the African people. The central issue that African theology must address is therefore the relevancy of the Christian faith to Africans.

2.3. THE BIRTH OF AFRICAN THEOLOGY

It is in the nature of the Christian faith, at every epoch and context, to constantly seek self-understanding in light of emerging situations and circumstances, and so it is true of the African continent. Christianity had to be presented in a way that resonated with the African people. In addition, there have been a plethora of other reasons contributing to the birth of African theology. Of great importance for our consideration are the colonisation of the African continent by European powers and the consequent liberation spirit that it provoked leading to the independence of the nation states of Africa. Other factors of secondary but nonetheless significant importance include the contribution of European writers and

[43] John Mbiti, "The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology," in *African Theology en Route*, ed. Appiah-Kubi and Torres (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), 83.
[44] John S. Pobee, "Contextuality and Universality in Theological Education," in *Variations in Christian Theology in Africa*, eds, Pobee and Hallencreutz (Nairobi: Uzima press, 1986), 5.
[45] John Kurewa, "the Meaning of African Theology," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 11 (Jun 1975), 36.
[46] Zablon Nthamburi, "African Theology as Theology of Liberation," *African Ecclesial Review* 22, no. 4 (1980), 232-239.

theologians and the impact of the increasing emergence of African Independent Churches on the continent.

2.3.1. THE COLONISATION FACTOR

African theology sprang up in the second half of the 20th century in the context of African popular resistance to colonial rule expressed in the African movements of Pan-Africanism, Nationalism and Socialism. While all these provided incentive and foundation for the rise of African theology, the concerns of Pan-Africanism and Nationalism for racial equality, political independence and preservation of the African culture were precursors to the birth of African theology.[47] They impressed on the African people the need to give Christian faith a liberative interpretation. Although African theologians did not use the term African liberation theology till late 1960s, their response to the prevailing political situation resulted in the theological trend called African theology.[48] The nationalist movements inspired the formation of the AACC, an organisation that gave impetus to and created a platform for African theologians to deliberate on African theology. It is not coincidental therefore that the first AACC conference in Ibadan was organised in the same year (1958) that Nkrumah called the first All Africa People's Conference in Accra, Ghana. More importantly, there was an overlap in the concepts and issues of freedom, unity and justice in both political and theological discourses. These constituted the themes of the respective conferences since both state and church were working for the realisation of a united, just, free and dignified African society.

To be relevant to her context, the church had to take up these themes and address them seriously in the light of biblical principles.[49] The exodus theme in which God liberated the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt was very central in those earliest years of African theology. It is therefore not surprising that most of the political writers and leaders of political movements had been educated in church schools and were practising Christians. African theology in this regard can be taken as a protest theology against the subjugation of

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[47] Denis Mpanga, *Towards a Catholic Theology in the African Context: Insights and Reservations from Karl Adam's Theology* (Zürich: Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 2016), 35.

[48] Muzorewa Gwinyai, *The Origins and Development of African Theology* (NewYork: Orbis Books, 1985, 46-52; Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 7-12. These political movements all stressed the liberation of the African people, of the black race regardless of wherever they found themselves. They aimed at asserting the identity, solidarity and empowerment and liberation of the black people. In themselves, they were good principles and resulted in the formation of socio-political and economical bodies of integration and confederations such as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

[49] Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 53.

the African people's thought and traditional religious beliefs and practices.[50] In their indignation the Africans did not spare the missionaries in the colonisation project who were perceived as providing support and assistance to the colonising powers and who in their discourse about God were suspected of fostering the subjugation and intimidation of the African people.[51] This is demonstrated by the close working relationship between colonial governments and their respective home missionary groups. In fact, colonial governments always preferred to work with missionary groups from their home countries and were uneasy about the presence of missionaries from other nationalities.[52] It is generally admitted that this relationship of mutual assistance between the missionaries and the colonial governments was obvious and the missionaries did little to distance themselves from it since their activities received legitimacy and support from their governments:

> When Germany lost its colonies in 1919 did not the German missionary congregations depart, along with their administrators, or did not the French, Belgian and British arrive in the same ships with their new administrators? And when Italy conquered Ethiopia how many Italian congregations suddenly discovered a missionary vocation in Ethiopia?[53]

The sweeping waves of the African political movements could not leave the Christian church untouched since the latter was regarded as an instrument in the hands of the colonial governments and suspected of collaborating with them. The nationalists argued that in order to ensure Africans' servile obedience these foreign governments used the missionaries to forcibly denounce everything African: rituals, arts, polygamy, and thus impress on the African people the feeling of inferiority and guilt.[54] To counter this argument the church in Africa had to articulate a theology that enhanced the African dignity and identity. Though

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[50] Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, 54.
[51] Mushete Ngindu, "An Overview of African Theology," in *Path of African Theology*, eds. Rosino Gibellini (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 10-11; AACC, *Drumbeats from Kampala: Report on The First Assembly of the AACC, Held at Kampala April 20 to April 30, 1963* (London: Lutterworth, 1963), 60.
[52] Victor Wan-Tatah, *Emancipation in African Theology: An Inquiry on the Relevance of Latin American Liberation Theology to Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988) 60-61. The French government in Cameroon and Togo allowed in only missionaries of French nationality; Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Context*, trans. John O'Donehue (Nairobi: Paulines, 1994), 43: The Flemish Scheut Missionaries were enormously supported by the Belgian King.
[53] Ngindu Mushete, "An Overview of African Theology," in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 11; quoting from A. Henry, "La mission sans frontières," *Parole et Mission* 8 (1965), 215.
[54] Bujo, *African Theology in Its Context*, 44-49

aware of the challenges involved the church supported the rising tide of nationalism and the growing demands for independence, seeing in the struggle to free themselves from any form of slavery an opportunity for the consolidation of the African people.

However, African theology did not only rise out of the popular context of political agitation and resistance to African colonisation by the western world - African theologians were not satisfied with no more than an African hierarchy or certain reforms in liturgy and doctrines. They wanted an African theology that would find latent seeds of the gospel in African traditional culture and religions. They wanted a theology that would have its own emphasis - life force, symbolism, intuition - rooted in the richness of the African tradition and religions.[55] The preoccupation of African theologians was therefore to highlight "the still potent reality of the traditional religions and their world views" and to establish continuity of the religious past with Christianity.[56] Hence, African theologians' task laid in interpreting the revelation contained in the heritage from the past.[57] This undertaking was a concern not only of the African theologians – as in the ideological oriented theology described above – but was inclusive and ecumenical. It included non-Africans such as the Belgian Franciscan missionary Placide Tempel with his work *Bantu Philosophy*.

Far from being reactionary colonial activities, African theology's task was to find "theological identity, a theological idiom and a Christian *modus vivendi* that would be more appropriate to the African context and reality".[58] African theologians thus argued that the foreign dimension to the Christianity introduced into continent was an obstacle to its becoming rooted in Africans' lives. Because of this, African Christianity was in dire need of a theology that was "grounded in the scriptures but also that had the unique engraving of the African people".[59] These theologians were keen to differentiate the enduring gospel message from the layers of traditions and practices of every age and peoples that Christianity has encountered. They demanded that the encounter with the Africans must also be given its own space in the theological discourse of Christianity. It is the view of African theologians that God addresses himself to the African people as a universal God who is familiar and at home with African languages, symbols, events, philosophy and world view. They contend that there is not just one sacred language in which God addresses every people of whatsoever

[55] Bujo, *African Theology in Its Context*, 58-60.
[56] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 76.
[57] Idowu Bolaji, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (London, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1965), 24-25.
[58] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 115.
[59] Matthew Michael, *Christian Theology and African Traditions* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 2.

culture and tradition.[60] Furthermore, they also argue that there is no single theology to adequately account for the diverse human experiences of the divine in every age and time.[61]

2.3.2. The Africanisation Project

African theology was a constitutive element in the call for the Africanisation of the church in Africa. It involved the call for an "incarnated Christianity in Africa".[62] The protagonists of African theology lamented the foreignness of Christianity to the African people. Most of the church organisations, liturgy and practice were handed to Africans as packages of doctrines formulated in concepts and idioms of western philosophy.[63] This therefore meant that, to embrace Christianity, an African was confronted with the demand to strip himself of his or her African nature and world view and get immersed or assimilated into the Western culture in order to understand the Christian faith or even better be a good Christian. Mugambi has attested to this historical record in the following way:

> To most missionaries from Europe and North America, evangelisation meant disorienting their objects of mission from "pagan, heathen, savage, primitive and barbaric" traditions. The practical objective was to turn the prospective converts into replicas of the missionary. Thus, on the scale of conversion, the foreign missionary gave himself 100% while the prospective convert was supposed to start at zero. On such a scale the missionary could measure his progress in terms of the degree to which his converts imitated him.[64]

The year 1956 started to witness the quest for African theology with some ground-breaking publications. The first of these was a thesis by Vincent Mulago, entitled "Life Unity Among the Bashi, Banyarwanda and Barundi". In the same year, a group of African priests published *Des Prêtres Noirs s'interrogent*. These early theological voices did not go well beyond forces of influence of the Pan-Africanism and nationalism movements. They endeavoured to demonstrate how religious Africans were and what elements in their culture could be used as raw material for the construction of Africa theology. In the early stages varied terminology

[60] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 60.
[61] Ibid., 22.
[62] Bujo, *African Theology in Its Context*, 66.
[63] John Parratt, *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, 4-5.
[64] Mugambi, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity* (Nairobi: Longman, 1989), 8.

was used to capture the reality of African theology depending on the objectives, substance or emphases of the context.

Among the catholic theologians, the Africanisation of the church started with the preference for the word 'adaptation' in which they argued for modifying the Christian message and church practice before applying them to the life of the people of Africa. After having heard and accepted the Christian message, the African people were to be able to live it in accordance with their own social and cultural norms and not the foreign ones preached by the missionaries. The task of adaptation required more than an interplay between Christian faith and African tradition and culture.[65] Rather, it sought to transcend the dialectics of Christian message and African culture to a level of genuine interaction and interpenetration of the two. Mulago referring to this interaction lucidly asserts that "having penetrated the mentality, culture and philosophy of the people to be conquered, we shall have to graft the message onto the proselyte's soul".[66] It is believed, it is only such serious encounter that can yield a lasting result in African Christianity. The main argument of adaptation is that the gospel message must be incarnated in African cultures. It advocates the need to Africanise doctrine and church practice conveying them through African idioms and thought patterns.[67] Ngindu Mushete is convinced that adaptation played a strong contribution to the realisation of the "Africanisation of ecclesial personnel, catechesis and liturgy, to cite but a few familiar areas".[68]

Catholic theologians shifted their preference from 'adaptation' to 'incarnation' in the 1970s. 'Adaptation' was considered to suggest an external influence, superficial and limited to only certain aspects of the African reality and God's revelation. The African church at 1970 Synod of bishops rejected 'adaptation' and expressed preference for 'incarnation' by which they meant that Christian faith was to be born into African culture and tradition, and in this way become truly African.

Meanwhile among the protestant African theologians, the accepted terminology used to express the Africanisation of the church was 'Indigenisation'. A renowned protagonist of indigenisation theology was Bolaji Idowa who emphasized the incorporation of church's liturgy, practice and ritual in African primal culture and religion so that these become

[65] Ngindu Mushete A. "An Overview of African Theology," in *Paths of African Theology*, 17.
[66] Vicent Mulago, *African Face of Christianity* (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1965), 23.
[67] John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 65.
[68] Ngindu Mushete A. "An Overview of African Theology", in *Paths of African Theology*, 18.

communicators of the Christian religion. He for example argued that the multiplicity of divinities in African religions is a manifestation of the supreme God. They are "his ministers acting as intermediaries between him and the world of men". They have no absolute existence and those who outgrow them can concentrate only on the absolute God.[69] In a similar way, John Parat agrees with Harry Sawyer that African concepts and rituals ought to be used in Christian discourse for better understanding.[70]

Kwame Bediako has observed that African theology advances the cause for continuous inclusion of certain elements and aspects of African tradition and religion in Christianity. There is expressed conviction that the primal imagination of the Africans can help in formulation and understanding of Christian transcendence. The proposition here is that African culture is a deep-seated and permanent influence on the African people. Even if Africans have embraced Christianity and scientific and technological advancement, they have avoided a secular outlook on reality and still view the universe as fundamentally spiritual. And because the African people respond to the gospel in their own religious, cultural and social context, the primary task of the evangelisers should not therefore consist in eradicating these valued cultural elements, but rather to make them find their ultimate fulfilment in Christianity.[71] This attempt to find continuation of African traditions and religions in Christianity can be said to engender enthusiasm and confidence in relation to African theology.

Critics of both adaptation and indigenisation have argued that neither of them takes scientific theology seriously. Their major shortcoming is in concordism – a tendency to confuse Christian revelation with a people's historical beliefs, traditions and practices. Moreover these cultural elements are always selectively isolated from their overall context and purpose.[72] Furthermore, the African cultural and traditional beliefs and practice are not as saintly as they are being presented by most African writers. Elements of superstition are glossed over in favour of one-sided anthropocentrism where the traditional African is always a wise, religious, pious and godly person.[73] In the same vein, the diversity of Africa – in geographical scope, ethnicities, languages, religious beliefs and practices, structures of administration, history, tend to be compromised in favour of constructing African theology.

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[69] Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare- *God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longman, 1962), 62-63.
[70] Parrat, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*, 12.
[71] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 172-176.
[72] Ngindu Mushete A. "An Overview of African Theology," in *Paths of African Theology*, 18.
[73] Parratt, *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, 59-60

Because of this diversity Mugambi thinks that it is not possible to speak of African theology or even the rather loosely agreed upon African philosophy.[74]

2.3.3. INCULTURATION THEOLOGY

As early as the 1970s, African theologians were moving towards a synthesis of African theology with popular works such as John Mbiti's *New Testament Eschatology in* an *African Background*; Charles Nyamiti's *African Theology: its Nature, Problems and Methods*; *African Tradition and the African God, the Scope of African theology*. All these involved the highlighting of vital elements such as hospitality and community life that are inherently rooted in the very being of an African. At the synod of the bishops for Africa and Madagascar meeting in Rome in 1974, a strong and consistent call was made to incarnate Christianity in Africa. There was need for a theological synthesis that would take the African context seriously – post-independence Africa needed theology that was relevant to the African context and time.[75] Serious efforts to incarnate Christianity were undertaken by a search for common ground between the Christian message and African traditional concepts so as to accommodate African world views within Christianity.[76] Such attempts involved the reconstruction or re-stating of dogmas in terms of African traditional beliefs and practices as they are drawn from ethnographical studies.[77]

The above quest does not however mean a repudiation or tendency to relativize the gospel. Rather, the conviction of these African theologians is that a well-grounded study of African theology has the gospel as a starting point. They share in the concern that a theology that does not take the Christian revelation seriously poses a danger to the universal significance of the Christian message. They argued that juxtaposing the cultural values in an absolutizing stance against the gospel undermines the uniqueness of Christ for redemption.[78] Christianity starts with God's definitive revelation in Christ, and therefore the primary source of Christian faith is Christian revelation. John S. Pobee recommends that African theology

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[74] Mugambi, *African Christian Theology*, 3-5. This is in reference to the critique that has been advanced against Mbiti's claim that Africans are differentiated by their shared philosophy of being. This belief has been regarded as a rather an excuse and credited bracket solution to escape from the task of understanding the other who is different to us. According to this critique, there is nothing that can be referred to as a collective spontaneous philosophy that can be referred to as a stable basis for an African theology.
[75] Bujo, *African Theology: In Its Social Context*, 65-66.
[76] Mbiti, "Some African Concepts of Christology", in *Christ and the Younger Churches*, ed. G. Vicedom (London: SPCK, 1972), 51-62.
[77] Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as our Ancestor: Christology from the African Perspective* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984).
[78] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 82-85.

must proceed by religionsgeschitliche method (the history of religions' approach) and make constructive use of the principle of analogy in relating the history and development of African tradition to biblical revelation.[79] This sense of Christianity has enabled the churches in Africa to be much more ecumenical than denominational as had been introduced by European missionaries, and Pobee thinks that this is close to the heart of the understanding of early church where unity and mission were inter-twined preoccupations of Christians.[80]

The thrust of the argument of inculturation theologians is the demand that African theology in addition to biblical sources, must pay due regard to the place of revelation in African religions and then use phenomenological approach to the African collected myths, proverbs, invocations, prayers, incantations, rituals, songs, dreams and bring them within the focus of the Christian theological arena.[81] In this way, Christianity has much to benefit from African traditional beliefs, not in the sense of new doctrines but of new insights and ways of understanding God and the relationship to him. Benezet Bujo decries the disappearance and perversion of African traditional practices and values such as hospitality and care for the elderly. Nonetheless, he remarks that despite this deterioration, there is a tendency to retrieve them because although they are not expressly enforced, they still come to bear consciously or unconsciously on African actions and attitudes towards life. The African people's traditions lie deep in their heart despite their embrace of the gospel message.[82]

2.4. AN INADEQUATE THEOLOGY: CRITICISM AND OPPOSITION

A number of critical voices have been raised against African theology from both outside the debates of African theology and within the discourse of African theology itself. There is general agreement on the fact that Africa has changed from what it was one hundred years ago. Much has changed and continues to change every day. Because of western influence with the experiences of colonialism and post-independence as well as Africa's engagement with the world community of nations, one cannot speak of a homogenous African culture. It is difficult to speak of African culture in the midst of the fluidity of boundaries in a contemporary globalised world. African culture is not an isolated fossil or museum's piece. Rather it is dynamic and living. It encompasses the past and the present systems of beliefs and practices. African traditional culture like any other cultures can be a pragmatically

[79] Pobee, *Towards an African Theology* (Nashvile: Abington, 1979), 31.
[80] Ibid., 33.
[81] Ibid., 33-34.
[82] Bujo, *African Theology*: *In Its Social Context*, 69-70.

evolving way of life that encompasses the dynamics of people's experience today. In addition, and more importantly, the undue prominence given to elements of traditional African cultures in the projects of Africanisation or Inculturation, in most cases, does not give African culture future dimension and new understanding of the African situation both theoretically and practically.[83] For culture is not like a fossil in a museum, but a living and dynamic reality. This reality, it is argued, adds to the existing difficulty of diversity of cultural practices within the vast African continent.[84]

Those more sympathetic in their assessment of missionary endeavour in Africa have argued that African theology has been simplistic and inordinately critical in accusing missionaries of eradicating African culture. They argue that the work of those missionaries in the recording and preservation of African stories, proverbs, languages cannot be simply regarded as an ethnographical activity but rather as an endeavour to salvage and enhance African culture.[85] Furthermore, it cannot be expected that the Christian missionaries upon setting foot on the African shores would disengage themselves from their social and religious convictions and adopt the African ways of life. Parratt has observed that much of the criticism against the missionaries is unwarranted and an oversight because it does not do justice to the truth that "missionaries were in many ways children of their age and products of what were often arrogant colonial culture".[86] Moreover the western education they offered by setting up education institutions fostered both religious and intellectual awareness and developed political consciousness to rise above the limitation of ethnicity, language, kinship to the embrace of a wider society and thus fostered the spirit of collaboration with others in the struggle for the independence of Africa.[87]

2.5. LIBERATION AS THE KERNEL OF AFRICAN THEOLOGY

Although the post-independence situations of oppression, marginalisation, deprivation, poverty amongst the majority poor on the one hand and the prosperity and accumulation of wealth by the minority rich gave impetus to the birth of African liberation theology, a liberation motif can be traced to the very inception of African theology albeit with different emphases. The concept of liberation is not only pervasive in the different moments of African

[83] Victor Wan-Tatah, *Emancipation in African Theology: An Inquiry on the Relevance of Latin American Liberation Theology to Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 149.
[84] Parratt, *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, 29-31.
[85] Ibid., 78-79.
[86] Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African theology Today*, 7-9.
[87] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 234.

theology, but it was and continues to form the internal dynamism that is the thrust of all African theology. With this conviction, Michel Istas observes that the concept of liberation informs African theology from its inception in the 1960s to the present. The idea of 'liberation', though in its differing mode and emphasis, has always been inherent in African theology. To illustrate this opinion, he discusses circumstances which he considers as objects of liberation theology through the past 5 decennia. It is important to look – in some depth - at his illustration.

Firstly, he perceives that African theology was born with and out of the liberation impetus. The waves of nationalism and independence of African nation states in the 1960s can be said to form the backdrop to the birth of African theology. The church could not afford to be indifferent but acted in resonance with the determination of the African people to extricate themselves from the yoke of colonisation and domination in all aspects of life. Moreover, the church itself had contributed towards empowering and conscientizing the people at least through its education services.[88] In the years that immediately followed independence, the church instructed and encouraged people through its pastoral and evangelisation organisations as evident in the pastoral letters of the time and urged the people to love and own their independence. Church leaders also appealed for unity and common purpose as conditions for prosperous independent nations of Africa.[89]

In the second instance, Istas continues, African theology in the 1970s was preoccupied with liberation from poverty. The failure of Africa's post-independence manifestos, particularly to eradicate poverty and establish development and prosperity in the general population, was a challenge to the independent states and the church as well. Christian theology had to find an answer to these predicaments with and for the people amid their shattered hopes in the face of the failure of the governments to deliver on their promises. The church rejected poverty as an evil to which people had been subjected by revolutionary

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[88] Michel Istas, "Liberation in African Theology," in *Faces of African Theology: Proceedings of the Seventh Interdisciplinary Session of the Faculty of Theology and Departments of Religious Studies, the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi* (Nairobi: CUEA, 2003), 37.

[89] Istas, "Liberation in African Theology," 38. Istas demonstrates this with examples of pastoral letters from the church in Kenya and Congo. Even in extremely evident condemnation of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya while asserting the need for law, order and peace, the church carefully did not seem to stifle the liberation content in the movement. Instead, it carefully recognised the hidden desire and aspiration that inspired the movement. In the same manner, the documents of the church in Congo gave expression of the people's feelings and aspirations for emancipation in political, social and economic spheres. They also gave guidelines in the running and management of personnel, institutions and country, and appealed for the sense of responsibility and stewardship in governance, and the safeguard of the common good.

governments; and proclamation and initiation of progress was integrated in church's pastoral programs to liberate people from poverty and social justice.[90]

The third consideration Istas posits is that the liberation agenda drove the resurgence of the debate on African culture to another level. So African theology was thickly coloured by liberation from cultural denial. A widespread call across the continent was made for a mature dialogue between the Christian message and African cultures – inculturation – and it was incumbent on the church to ensure that this task would eventually lead to a marriage between the gospel and culture. Driven by the liberation dynamism, the inculturation theology challenged the church to appreciate and give due dignity to the richness of African 'life' as it is willed by God.[91] Fourthly, Istas observes that the tone of the church's pastoral letters of all times addressing dictatorial regimes and systems in Africa, can be seen as the fourth moment of liberation motif in Africa.[92]

Lastly, Istas sees liberation motif at play in the spirituality of the theology of reconstruction which appears to be characterising the face of contemporary African theology. This is a reconstruction of African theology that in addition to the cultural, socio-economic and political context of Africans takes spiritual orientation as the primary underpinning for any theological undertaking. Consequently, the scope of African theology does not only widen to encompass spiritual concerns but puts emphasis on spiritual liberation – from evil forces and vices – so that African people thereby arrive at constructive liberation in relation to worldly concerns.[93]

Although the concept of liberation pervaded all moments of African theology, as Istas has demonstrated, its force never came to effectively inspire and shape the method and task of African theology. This observation necessitated the shift of emphasis away from liberation

[90] Istas, "Liberation in African Theology," 45. Istas' work reveals that programmatic activities were initiated by the church for the attainment of integral human development. However, he remarks that although both the church's and state's activities were centred on the same human person, their interests and approaches did not always converge. The church warned against false and easy optimism, and dissuaded African leaders from taking lead patterns of other continents, but instead focus attention on specific situations of African context.
[91] Istas, "Liberation in African Theology," 47.
[92] Ibid., 49. The church made "repeated calls for the implementation of democratic reforms, and an appropriate form of government on the continent". The church made abundant explanation of its position and option for democratic system and denounced the misuse of powers in governance matters that would incite the population into violence. The church thus exercised its prophetic testimony to oppression, killing and abuse of people's rights by governments – in most cases committed discreetly - and aired them out to public platforms.
[93] Istas, "Liberation in African Theology," 54-56. The contention is that African liberation theology's task is to strengthen the spiritual foundations of religious life and practices so that people have the capacity to negate every anti-life forces in the society. It is believed that the combat of social evils will be inspired by spirituality of liberation. It is believed that this deep spiritual reservoir will provide resources for the building up of a just, peaceful, united, and prosperous Africa.

under the form of inculturation to a theology that out rightly articulates liberation as its force and framework.

2.6. FROM INCULTURATION TO LIBERATION

At the peak of inculturation theology, African theologians started to become increasingly dissatisfied with the practical relevance of African theology to Africa's post-independence contexts. One strong criticism of the African theology of inculturation has been that it places undue emphasis on African culture as hermeneutic of Christian faith while being indifferent or paying inadequate attention to the prevailing contextual realities of the African people. The point of contention has been that inculturation theology does not seriously address the socio-economic and political situation of the African people which in fact ought to be the issue at stake. Rather, its rhetoric is preoccupied with the African past and fosters an inferiority complex vis-à-vis the west. Bujo insists that African theology must address itself to an African person taking into account his or her post-independence context where misery and poverty are precipitated and enhanced by bad governance policies, corruption, oppression and marginalisation of the masses by the political elites of the independent African nation states. Under these circumstances, he argues that it is no longer sufficient or even relevant to speak of theology of inculturation or echo the songs of negritude or nationalistic movements – whose protagonists have turned against the masses – but to articulate a theology that preoccupies itself with the liberation of the poor, marginalised and disadvantaged people of Africa.[94].

Mugambi for example moved beyond the inculturation debate and argued for a theology that concerned itself with articulating and confronting the real issues of contemporary society– and stop lamenting over a fossilised cultural past. What was at stake for him already in the 1970s was the liberation of Africans from exploitation, prejudice, oppression and poverty. According to him, African theology's concerns should be "interpreting and understanding the relevance of God's revelation for the total liberation of humankind in the African economic, political and social situation", and must have as its main focus liberation from all negative forces that hinder full life and the attaining of holistic human needs.[95] In the same vein, Bediako took stock of the existential situation of the

[94] Bujo, *African Theology: In Its Social Contest*, 15.
[95] Mugambi, *African Christian Religion*, 12-14. This insensitivity to the development and growth of the African human person is attested to by Nupanga Weanzana. He pinpoints to the historical fact that Christian institutions

African continent as a basis to argue for African liberation theology. These issues according to him must be addressed by the gospel of Christ.[96]

A distinctive feature of African theology ought not to be found in cultural expression but in applying the gospel to particular current African contexts in ways that provide fresh insights into ways of living. The gospel is discovered as Good News for the poor (materially poor, oppressed and underprivileged).[97] The shared contention of these theologians has been that African theology has not been successful in addressing itself to the African people at critical points in their life and history. According to Bujo, African theology by 1992 had become a sterile academic discourse, and far removed from developments and unfolding in the African continent. In this regard he asserts that "no one could take seriously a theology which preached the necessity of inculturation, but simply ignored the surrounding social misery".[98] In fact, notwithstanding the commitment of the church organisations to the poor, Bujo argued that the failure of the church's hierarchy to openly confront oppressive and unjust governments or to launch actions in support of the poor and marginalised has been attributed in the main to the kind of theology – inculturation – that has dominated the African theological spectrum for a long time. This situation, in his judgement, has resulted in lack of demonstration of commitment from the church hierarchies to share in the plight of the poor masses. What is crucial for African church, according to Bujo, is a commitment to action for the poor rather than theoretical stories about culture for the sake of drawing the attention of international audiences interested in artefacts. African theology must seek to be meaningful and relevant to the African people by relating the gospel to their historico-social experience. It must be a privileged position where Africans find and define themselves.[99] In a similar way, Muzorewa observes that "the average African Christian is not concerned about abstractions; insights established in the light of God's grace and justice must have practical significance", and there is a need for "a framework within which people may understand and actively respond to political, social and religious issues."[100] From the foregoing, it can be

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and organisations during colonisation did not promote independent African leadership formation because "they often had an overly narrow focus on spiritual and religious goals to the exclusion of a more encompassing vision of human flourishing". Nupanga Weanzana, "Word and Deed: Patterns of Influential African Christian Organisations," in *African Christian Leadership: Realities, Opportunities and Impacts*, eds. Robert J. Priest and Kirimi Barine (New York: Orbis Books, 2017), 107.

[96] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 128-129.

[97] Ibid., 144.

[98] Bujo, *African Theology: In Its Social Context*, 70.

[99] Ibid., 71-72.

[100] Muzorewa, *The Origins and Developments*, 99-100.

seen that African theology of inculturation had outlived its urgency and relevance in post-independence Africa and a shift of emphasis was therefore inevitable.

Because African liberation theology takes up questions that affect the wholeness of life, it addresses a wide range of issues from spiritual, pastoral, social, political, cultural and economic spheres of the people of Africa. It moves away from a narrow view of spiritual liberation to an encompassing vision of liberation of the human person. It addresses itself not only to individual persons but also, and more importantly, to ecclesiastical, political, social and economic structures. It therefore enters into dialogue with colonisation, neo-colonisation, independence, nationalism, emancipation, renaissance, globalisation, foreign aid, magisterium and universality of the church, poverty among others. All these ideologies, agendas or schemes impact directly or indirectly, positively or negatively on the poor people of Africa. African liberation theology does not only look at them with suspicion, but it scrutinises the heinous motives which, albeit hidden, are capable of unleashing destructive effects on the poor.

3. AFRICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Already at the Third World Theologians' Conference in Ghana in 1977, inspired by Latin American liberation theology, the African liberation agenda with features particular to the African context, was dominant in African theological deliberations.[101] At this conference it was clearly articulated that "oppression is found not only in culture, but also in political and economic structures and the dominant mass media… African theology must also be liberation theology."[102] African liberation theology found resonance in Latin American liberation theology, not however in the sense of copying or replicating it, but to orient it strongly to Africa's specific contextual problems. Otherwise it would not be different from any other colonising thought system and on Africa, this time from the Latin American world.[103] African theologians inspired by Latin American liberation theology developed the confidence and the audacity to question and even reject certain western interpretations of Christianity. They

[101] Wan-Tatah, *Emancipation in African Theology: An Inquiry on the Relevance of Latin American Liberation Theology to Africa*, ix.
[102] Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres eds., "Final Communiqué: Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians, Dec.17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana," in *African Theology en Route* (New York: Maryknoll, 1979), 194.
[103] Wan-Tatah, *Emancipation in African Theology*, 1-3. African's theologians with due sensitivity to the needs of African context in the beginning could only show, as a matter of urgency, the liberative dynamism in the incorporation of the cultural and traditional aspects of the African people into theological reflection and praxis.

argued that Christian theology must not be indifferent to, but take up the plight and aspirations of the suffering and downtrodden people of Africa, and be on their side in their struggles to liberate themselves.[104] At any rate, the crux of African liberation theology is the salvaging of human life that is threatened and deprived of the opportunity to flourish by massive exploitation and marginalisation. In their commitment, liberation theologians emphatically urge for the need to get interested in the plight of the underprivileged and suffering because they are the reason the Son of God became man and suffered the cross. What is then urgent for African liberation theology is not only the African soul but the totality of life. This theological approach to the human person consists not primarily in condemnation or call to conversion, but also active participation in liberation from enslavement to poverty, oppression, diseases, ignorance, injustice, illiteracy, and all dehumanising elements.[105]

Per Frostin has outlined three features of African liberation theology that distinguishes it from any other moments of African theology. Firstly, African liberation theology takes up concerns of everyday life as it is lived. It does not preoccupy itself with the questions of reason, nature and doctrine. Secondly, the people whom a liberation theologian encounters, and who form the interlocutors in the theological discourse, are the poor, marginalised, and oppressed people of Africa. The situations of these people raise key questions of faith that African theologians cannot gloss over or ignore in pursuit of the so-called exotic topics such as the relationship between faith and reason or between theology and philosophy. Thirdly, the relationship of the theologian to the interlocutor is more ethical than epistemological.[106]

Before delving into the depth of African liberation theology, I consider it important to look briefly at the different strands of liberation theology. This will help us appreciate the argument I make for a kenotic African liberation theology in this dissertation. Again, to point out in passing, these trajectories espouse a theology that is invincible, militant, exclusive, and has a tendency to anthropological triumphalism. Its clamour for liberation leaves them with the danger of being selective of certain aspects of the Christ's events and thereby limited in scope and not representative of an integral form of Christ.

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[104] Wan-Tatah, *Emancipation in African Theology*, 5.
[105] Ibid., 9. Appealing to *Gaudium et spes* article 13, Wan-Tatah conceives salvation as liberation. *Gaudium et spes* therefore "provided the methodological and thematic fuel for liberation theologians of Latin America (Ibid., 119).
[106] Frostin Per, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and S. Africa* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1988).

3.1. TRAJECTORIES OF AFRICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

As already stated, the concept of liberation is central and is to be found in all variants of African theology. It is the life-giving force for African theology. In this section focus will be directed to the strands of African theology that has liberation motif as their force. These strands include Black theology of liberation, Feminist theology, African Independent or Pentecostal liberation theology[107] and liberation theology as it is articulated by catholic theologians, which for this study will be represented by Jean Marc Ela. To serve our purpose, we shall briefly consider the first three strands, and then to serve the purpose this research I have considered taking an in-depth treatment of the theology of Jean Marc Ela for the purpose of later dialogue and synthesis in chapters four and five. It is important to state from the outset that this apparent classification does signify a complete isolation of the strands from one another. In fact, the Black theology, Feminist theology, the Pentecostal theology and the catholic liberation theology all converge on the need to have the liberative thrust of the gospel at work in the African life and situation. However, I share in the argument that these trajectories of liberation theology have rather a "narrow focus"[108] as compared to the mainstream liberation theology.

3.1.1. BLACK THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

The South African Black theology of liberation emerged and became popular in South Africa in the early 1970s. Its origins are found in a number of factors, both internal and external. Emmanuel Martey outlines three sources of South Africa's Black theology: the Black experience, Black Consciousness, the Bible and the American heritage.[109] Simon S. Maimela has defined Black theology of liberation as "a conscious and systematic theological reflection

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[107] Wan-Tatah, *Emancipation in African Theology*, 147; 163-168.

[108] Ivan Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology: An Argument and Manifesto* (Hampshire: Ashgate Press, 2004), 134.

[109] Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*, 99-110. It is asserted by Martey that the Black Theology of South African did not rise out of a vacuum. First, the Black historical experience of oppression, exploitation, marginalisation had such devastating effects on the black people's psyche, anthropological awareness, reflection and activities. The black experience became the theological hermeneutic with the resultant stand point that the God of history sides with the oppressed against the oppressors. Secondly, the 'black consciousness' – a political philosophy that articulated new awareness, new identity and positive affirmation of blackness - was inspirational for the rise of South African Black theology. Its activities affected biblical interpretation and theological reflection of the blacks in South Africa. Thirdly, the development of the African biblical scholarship, particularly the hermeneutics of suspicion with its critical stance towards the western hermeneutics with its ideological and theoretical assumptions was a great source of South African Black theology. The black Africans read and interpreted biblical texts for the transformation of themselves and their society. Finally, the writings of Black American theologians and the various consultations between the scholars and theologians from both America and Africa contributed greatly to the emergence of South African Black theology. The success of Black Americans was an inspiration for South African theologians.

on black experience which is characterised by oppression and suffering in white racist societies in North America and South Africa".[110] The black theology of South Africa emerged in the context of oppression, marginalisation and segregation of the black African race by the white Afrikaner race primarily on the ground of racial difference. In addition to other conjectured and biased reasons to justify their oppression of the black race, the white population of South Africa – not to the exclusion of the white Dutch Reformed church – gave their apartheid a theological legitimisation. They believed that it was divine ordinance that the white race was superior to the black race, and as such was chosen to salvage the coloured races. The white Afrikaner people of South Africa then came to consider themselves as the chosen Israel, the anointed people of South Africa called to preserve God's righteousness which is as it were enshrined in whiteness, and to civilise other races of colour. This sense of superiority led to emergence of Afrikaner nationalism with its emphasis on the supremacy of the white race and the discrimination against the blacks as inferior people to be subjugated and enslaved. Colour determined who is to be human and entitled to favourable treatment or privileges in South African society.[111]

The black theology of liberation of South Africa emerged as a theological protest against the Dutch reformed church's theology that had sanctioned and legitimised the apartheid and the misery and suffering it unleashed on the coloured people of South Africa. It sprang up from Africans' re-reading of the bible and through having discovered the self-serving interpretation of the same bible by white theologians seeking justification for their supremacy over the black people. It then dawned on the black African reader that the God of the gospel is a God of liberation, one who takes the side of the poor and the oppressed against the oppressor. They therefore appealed to the church to take the side of the poor and oppressed in their struggles to free themselves from the bonds of slavery to which they had been subjugated by virtue of their colour.[112] The urgency of liberation in the apartheid context is aptly captured by James Cone when he asserts with conviction that "the content of the Christian gospel is liberation, so that talk about God that fails to take seriously the righteousness of God as revealed in the liberation of the weak and downtrodden is not Christian language".[113] Enlightened on this fundamental truth black South Africans began to

[110] Simon S. Maimela, "Black Theology of Liberation," in *Path of African Theology*, 182.
[111] Ibid., 187-88.
[112] Ibid., 192-93.
[113] James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 155; Basil Moore, *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974), 52.

see themselves as also fully human, God's people, the poor people of God whom he loves. They believed in the God of history who is determined to take the side of the poor and to save them from oppression. Black theology portrays God as an advocate who in his justice stands for the cause of the oppressed and defenceless.[114]

3.1.2. FEMINIST THEOLOGY

Feminist theology has developed from the bosom of liberation theology. Mary Grey captures this very well in her lucid definition of the feminist theory as "a critical theology of liberation engaged in the construction of theology and religion in the service of the transformation process in specificity of the many contexts in which women live"[115]. In Africa, just as in the rest of the Third World countries, the debates on liberation theology did not take up the cause of women even though women continued to suffer exclusion and deprivation or even oppression in societies in which the liberation agenda was high. It was not until the 5th conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians at New Delhi in 1981 that women voices were incorporated into theological projects. In 1989 Mercy Amba Oduyoye assembled a group of African women academics to plan the formation of the network called *the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*, commonly referred to as "The Circle", to organise and consolidate African women's efforts in their liberation struggles against oppression by patriarchal African society.[116] African women theologians reject romanticizing the African cultural values and the general categorization of the Africans as the 'poor' without due consideration of the inherent multi-dimensional socio-cultural layers which include discriminatory elements perpetuating the suffering of women. Gender inequality, hierarchical stratification of members of communities, tribal and ethnic discrimination are endemic in African society. It is not expected that these evils will be confronted by the same male folks who have used them to marginalise and dominate women. The experience of women and their place in African society and the church is therefore the point of departure in feminist theology.[117] It confronts the patriarchal systems and exposes the blind spots imbedded in beliefs and practices which communities have guarded and

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[114] Maimela, "Black Theology of Liberation," 192-94.
[115] Mary Grey, "Feminist Theology: A Critical Theology of Liberation," in *Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, 89.
[116] Carrie Pemberton, *Circles Thinking: African Women Theologians in Dialogue with the West* (Leiden: Brill, 2003),
[117] Valentin Dedji, *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology*, 27-28; Therese Souza, "The Christ-event from the view point of African Women: A Catholic Perspective," in *With Passion and Compassion*, eds. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 29.

nurtured as cultural values and taboos resulting in the subordination of women. For example, it rejects anthropological duality that gives superiority to male over female, the patriarchal interpretation of humanity and scientific discourses to the inclusion of theology. Mercy Oduyoye, calls for a relationship of mutual equality between men and women, and not hierarchical anthropology that subjugates women and oppresses them.[118]

Feminist theologians share the fundamental issues of feminism such as autonomy, integrity, equality and dignity. Typically, they support black African attitudes towards colonisation or neo-colonisation, nationalism, slave trade, globalisation. However, they oppose the divinisation of African cultural beliefs and practices that have been very much the subject of African theological literature. They protest against the assigning of roles to women by a society that has been structured to the exclusive advantage of the men. They protest against some traditional and cultural beliefs and practices that regard women as the property of men[119] and the right to participate or not to participate in socio-political and economic debates and activities being given to women under determined gender-polarised frame work of cultural norms and practices and not on individual women's qualification, personality, competence or ability.

3.1.3. EVANGELICAL LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Another distinctive way of speaking about Christian liberation theology is found in what could be designated Evangelical, Pentecostal or Charismatic. In the African context this is commonly represented by the African Independent Churches (AIC) which have been defined as Christian churches "founded in Africa by Africans, and primarily for Africans".[120] These churches are an increasing phenomenon on the African continent and are commonly given titles such as 'African Initiated Churches' or 'African Instituted Churches'. This is designed to distinguish them, as well as other emerging Pentecostal or Prophetic or Charismatic Churches, from 'African Indigenous Churches", that were established following the call for the indigenisation and inculturation of churches founded by Europeans**.**[121] Examples of such popular African Independent churches include Kimbanguist Church, the Christ Apostolic

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[118] Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 17.
[119] Oduyoye, "Feminist Theology in an African Perspective," in *Paths of African Theology*, 175.
[120] P. David Barret and T. John Padwick, *Rise up and Walk!: Concilliarism and the African Indigenous Churches, 1815-1987): Sequel to Schism and Renewal in Africa (1968)* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1989), I; also cf. Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Asmara: African World Press, 2001), 10.
[121] Ibid., 10-11; 16-17. They are independent churches in that although they have historical and theological connection to the western Pentecostalism, they are nonetheless different in their own right.

Church, the Aladura, Harrist, Zion Christian Christ, Amanazaretha church and others. At the heart of their theology and activities is the appeal to the Holy Spirit to effect healing, deliverance and liberation primarily from the forces of evil that bind and keep people in a state of enslavement. They therefore stress the "influence of the Holy Spirit and of divine healing".[122]

Notwithstanding their rejection of witchcraft, sorcery, divination and ancestry rituals, the AIC have forged a 'biblical alliance' with African traditional culture and religion – instead of exhibiting aggression and intolerance to it as did the missionaries of mainstream churches – and proclaim the strength of the gospel to bring deliverance from assailing evils. They therefore preach the gospel in language and symbols that people are familiar with. They are able to adapt and integrate African customs and values into Christian discourse and rituals. Of paramount significance is their incorporation of African philosophy such as the vital force.[123]

It is very important here to note how the AIC's integration of African philosophy has played an immense role in the successful planting and flourishing of churches in the African context. Various studies have identified the concept of the vital force or power or strength that one needs in order to live well as being central to African philosophy. It is strongly asserted that the primary duty of an individual is to maintain or increase the vital force. The vital energy can be diminished or tempered by external forces – some beyond physical nature – and one has the primary obligation to restore it. Conversely, the vital force can be increased by seeking sources of power outside and beyond self. It is believed that "the greatest disaster possible follows the losing of life force and so everything possible is done to avoid its loss and to promote its increase."[124]

Life or existence is tied to power. To fulfil this power need, specialists such as diviners or medicine men are instituted as offices to offer consultation, prescription or actual deliverance in cases of threat or danger to the vital force. Their activities are based on the perception that the material and spiritual realities are intertwined and bound together so that natural causality cannot be distinguished or treated isolated from the spiritual realm. As has been observed by Paul Gifford, the belief in the spiritual forces extends to such conviction as "there is no matter or event that might not be influenced by the gods, ancestors, spirits, or witches".

[122] Barret and T. John Padwick, *Rise up and Walk!*, 13.
[123] Ibid., 195.
[124] Ibid., *Rise up and Walk!*, 196.

Consequently, every misfortune or setback, however evident a physical cause may be, also receives a spiritual explanation.[125] And because every African's problem – ranging from physical health, poverty, unemployment and others - are always deemed to be more than mere physical realities, explanations or solutions to them cannot be adequately given by any scientific knowledge and skills**.** Accordingly, Africans must seek the African spiritual experts who are able to prescribe answers or solutions to all predicaments. This means of addressing the needs of African people largely explains the mushrooming of AICs on the continent.

3.2. AFRICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY: PERSPECTIVES OF JEAN MARC-ELA

This strand of African liberation theology refers to the theology propounded by theologians who are located south of the Sahara to the exclusion of South Africa, and who write from the standpoint of their faith in the mainstream Christian churches. It is important to note that although these theologians identify with the denomination church, and in this case the Catholic Church, they do not necessarily have to have an approval from ecclesiastical hierarchies, but they derive their inspiration and legitimacy from the shared life of faith of the community. African liberation theology then is a reflection of a theologian who, confronted with the African situation in which he or she finds him or herself and others, gives expression to these realities from the depth of the wealth of Christian faith. For this research I will draw primarily on the major works of the noted theologian and sociologist Jean-Marc Ela as they are widely regarded as giving the thrust of the spirit of liberation theology in sub-Saharan Africa. The choice of Ela does not mean he is the only liberation theologian in the category. There are indeed others but whose articulation and depth of the liberation ideas are less compelling when compared to Ela.[126]

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[125] Paul Gifford, "Trajectories in African Christianity," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 8, no. 4 (2008), 280-281.

[126] Laurenti Magesa is being acknowledged as a liberation theologian, but from the ethical perspective. As testified by Richard Rwiza, his conviction is that African theology must have the moral imperative to liberate the African people from cultural, socio-economic and political servitude. Richard Rwiza, "Laureti Magesa: An African Liberation Theologian," in *African Theology in the 21st Century: The Contribution of the Pioneers* vol.2, eds. Benezet Bujo and Juvenal (Nairobi: Paulines, 2008), 231-234. Magesa has put forth his liberative thought in a number of works and the few notably to mention are: "The Ethics of Liberation," *African Ecclesial Review* 22 (1980), 101-111; "Political Axis of African liberation Theology," in *Liberation Theologies on Shifting Grounds: A Clash of Social-Economic and Cultural Paradigms*, ed. G. De Schrijver (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 144; "Eucharist, Unity and Justice in Eastern Africa Today," *AFER* 21(1979), 90-98; "Has the Church a Role in Politics?" in *Towards African Christian Liberation*, eds. A. Shorter et al (Nairobi: Paulines, 1990). Others considered as liberation theologians in sub-Saharan Africa include Engelbert Mveng, F. Eboussi Boulaga and John Mary Waliggo. Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 103.

Jean-Marc Ela, a Cameroonian Catholic priest was born in 1936. In the 1960s he studied in France and obtained a doctorate in theology at the university of Strasbourg and another PhD in sociology at the Sorbonne University. After the completion of his studies Ela went back to Cameroon and for 16 years served as a missionary among the Kirdi people of northern Cameroon. It is while embedded in the concrete life situation of the Kirdi that he wrote his two major works, *African Cry* and *My Faith as an African*,[127] to which we shall mainly limit our references. On 2nd February, he received honorary doctorate at Catholic University of Louvain on the recommendation of the Interfaculty Council of Development Cooperation.

Although Ela's theological reflections are evoked by his encounter with the reality of the lives of the Kirdi, he nonetheless extrapolates and applies them to the wider African situation as he came to the realisation that "the drama of the Kirdi is shared by millions of African peasants who ask only to live".[128] His location in the midst of the village people made him both critical and suspicious of the church's traditional ways of talking about God. The situation of the 'bush' people, in whose life he was fully involved, he describes as a 'shock', the evidence of 'invisible slavery', revealing a people 'rejected and bereft of decision-making power', 'defenceless and deprived', 'exploited and oppressed'.[129] Faced with these precarious situations, Ela asked himself these radical questions: "What is the cutting edge of the gospel that can be most directly accessible and meaningful for these people? How can we live our faith, and thus create around us a desire for the living God? Don't we have to convert ourselves before preaching conversion to others?"[130] Against this background, he could not avoid questioning the effectiveness and relevancy of the method and task of theology in which he had been educated. Simon E. Smith in his foreword to *My Faith as an African* refers to the writings of Ela as "Liberation theology with an African face".[131] Ela's theological work is an open indictment of both the state and church in Africa. It is therefore no wonder that he was isolated by the church and threatened by the state authorities. Following the murder of his close associate and friend, Engelbert Mveng in 1995, Ela was forced into voluntary exile in Canada where he spent the rest of life till his death in 2008.

3.2.1. Integrating the Social Concerns

[127] *African Cry*, trans. Rober R. Barr (New York: Orbis Books, 1986); *My Faith as an African*, trans. John Pairman and Susan Perry (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1988). These seminal works from hereafter will be abbreviated AC and MF respectively.
[128] MF, 88.
[129] Ibid., 4.
[130] Ibid., 5.
[131] Ibid., ix.

Ela was distinctive in using his sociological expertise to bring a social science critique to his theology. He was convinced that theological reflection on religious faith and practice must take full account of the social context in which people live. The concrete existential situation that people experience ought to be the starting point of talking meaningfully to them about God and not a preoccupation with religiously stagnant discourses on sacraments, grace and sin.[132] The survey of the contextual situation as experienced by the village people is an indictment not only of the state's leadership and governance but also of the global political agenda. Ela is convinced that the misery of the rural African population is as a result mainly of the structural policies which are "veritable daggers in the heart", yet theology seems willing to ignore them.[133] He is suspicious and critical towards popular socio-economic and political ideologies and policies such as privatisation, economic liberalisation, which either displace the rural population from their arable farm lands or force them to engage in agricultural production that does not contribute directly to their livelihood or under which they suffer exploitation by profit-driven multi-national businesses and individuals.

Ela denounces the oppressive system of governance that stifles any initiative by disadvantaged sections of the population to extricate themselves from the clutches of domination by the minority rich elites. In addition he is highly critical of the situation where unemployment looms over the African continent, where the future for the young people is bleak, illiteracy levels are high, and even those in schools have little hope of getting absorbed into jobs.[134] He decries the fact that African states are governed by military rulers who suppress any legitimate critical voices, the effect being that the so-called 'stability of certain regimes is insured only at the prize of bloody repression".[135] To ensure the stability and perpetuation of this system that keeps the majority trapped in misery, the biggest allocation of the national budget goes to the military and other organised forces, leaving very little or no possibility of job creation for the masses. Most of the population go jobless and the few who are employed in the private sector are exploited because of the absence of protective legislation. Thus, Ela remarks that "where administrative and military expenditures cancel all possibilities of creating new employment for millions of unemployed youth, foreign

[132] MF, 91, 149.
[133] AC, v.
[134] Ibid., 81.
[135] Ibid., 67-69.

companies do not hesitate to take advantage of the absence of the right to strike, to use any pretext at all to discharge those of their workers who seem too demanding."[136]

The conclusion Ela comes to is that there is an evil alliance established between multi-national corporations and minority elites in Africa to suppress the peasant men and women who comprise the majority of its people. Rather than improving the conditions of living of the rural poor this coalition massively exploits them.[137] And since the welfare of the majority, the poor living on the fringes of cities and towns, finds no place in the priorities of either governments or multi-national corporations the exploited poor have nowhere to take refuge. The priority given to the called key economic activities (cash crops and mining activities) serves to sustain oppressive government systems and to bring profit to business firms but does nothing to improve the common peoples' daily ration of food.[138] Rather, these activities benefit only those who are in political government, ranks of administrations, traditional leaders.[139] In this situation, the strategy of the state and the strategy of the people collide since the external orientation of the government and survival of peasants run opposite to each other.[140] Because the elites are in control of the machinery of the government including the macro means of production, they, the few educated and those in military and organised forces triumph and prevail in almost all uprisings. The gulf between the elites, who are scandalously soaked in all kinds of privileges, and the poor peasants, who are left to agonising misery is ever-widening apart. Ela notes that in Africa, health care is the privilege of the elites,[141] and social security fund is "reserved solely for government employees"[142] to the extent that even in the event of scarce presence of medical services in villages either established by the government or private business, the tendency is to locate them in towns or cities where the affluent minority can have easy access to them.[143] In this situation, the African poor are left to a miserable fate. They are defenceless against the aggressive ploy from both the state governments and the business corporations. Confronted by these realities of the African continent, Ela believes that the struggle for the liberation of the poor must constitute the subject of our theological discourse. As has rightly been observed by Valentin, Ela's chief

[136] AC, 70
[137] MF, 89.
[138] AC, 83-84.
[139] MF, 95.
[140] Ibid., 96.
[141] Ibid., 69.
[142] Ibid., 72.
[143] Ibid., 73.

concern in his writings is the "human condition in Africa in the light of God's revelation".[144] His preoccupation with the existential conditions of the rural poor can only be understood against the backdrop of his conviction that our faith in the God of Christian revelation can only be understood in concrete events of life and never in abstraction. He illustrates that the Christian faith "can only be lived through the warps and wefts of the events that make up history".[145]

3.2.2. A Call for a Critical Self-Understanding and Mission of the African Church

Having taken a panoramic view of the prevailing situation of the African context in which the church is situated and mandated to do its mission, Ela turns his critical focus to the church itself. He argues that if the church has to measure up to its proper calling it has to undergo some reforms however painful they might be. He observes that in the church there is a preference for a spirituality that gives little if any, encouragement for true confrontation with the socio-economic and political arrangements in which people find themselves. He laments that if any thought has been given at all to these aspects, it is generally in the form of pre-determined prescriptive solutions or remedies rather than a thoughtful and systematic analysis of actual situations and demand pragmatic steps to be taken to remedy them. To buttress his rejection of this stance, he takes the church back to its very origin and foundation and argues that the it was born from and inspired by the Easter mysteries, particularly from the Cross and the Eucharist. The church as the people of God must then strive "to break themselves, to be willing to die to themselves, to share themselves in thanksgiving to God".[146] As the Eucharistic people, oneness with God impels us into oneness with the people in their existential conditions. We die to ourselves – kill our selfishness – so that Christ takes charge of us and stir us into communion for action in the world. In this way, the Eucharist is not only about spiritual things but also socio-economic and political concerns of life. Seen from this perspective, the practice of the Christian religion will not be separate from the fortuitous conditions of daily living but in fact will be at the centre of them. Religion then cannot be an escape from worldly troubles and cares by offering flight into a spiritual realm. Neither should it rob the human person of his or her critical thinking and replacing it with "providentialism" or the unquestioning belief in the guardianship of a caring God. Ela

[144] Valentin Dedji, *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology*, 221.
[145] AC, 28.
[146] Ibid., 1.

therefore concludes that there should be no opposition between rituals that are grounded in the supernatural and social services that are designed to reduce the burdens of actual living, but that they must go hand in hand in tackling Africa's predicaments.[147]

Ela believes that African church's lack of active presence and involvement in social and political affairs is due to uncritical conformity to traditional prejudices that ignore the link between the socio-political world and the practice of religious faith. He summons African church leaders and theologians to wake up and critically analyse root cause of oppression and enslavement of the African people. He is convinced that a dispassionate analysis conducted with sincerity and without prejudice will reveal that the essential problem does not lie in African traditional cultures or mental structures. African church leaders and theologians, in his view, must therefore uncompromisingly reject such biases and thus "contribute to distinguishing the real nature of under development which is not fatalistically inherent in nature but an effect of structures of domination and dependence".[148] Rising above this indifference to the social realities of African people's lives will enable the Christian religion to occupy a central place in people's daily activities as it will become the "locus of combat for the liberation of the oppressed",[149] thus contradicting Marx's accusation that "religion is the opium of the people". In order to meet this requirement, Ela urges the church in Africa to distance itself from any ideology or system that has no interest in fostering a vast improvement in the quality of life of all Africans and especially the most deprived.

Ela considers the incorporation of social questions in church priorities as something of urgency that the church must undertake without delay for there are millions of people who go hungry without bread, shelter and are bereft of hope. Therefore, the role of the Christian religion must not be limited to ritual celebrations without corresponding interest in the social needs of the people.[150] In this way, Christian faith in Africa can be meaningful only if its reflection and praxis takes serious account of questions of human dignity, integrity and freedom. The question of meaningfulness impels the church to accept that it may not allow itself to be to be silenced, intimidated or marginalised in its practical concern for the social life of the people. If it is to do needed service to the people of Africa, the church must go further than discharge its responsibilities in spiritual matters. It must now assert itself in the intellectual, social and political arenas, not as a rival but as a guarantor of the conscience of

[147] AC, 39-43.
[148] Ibid., 45.
[149] Ibid., 46.
[150] Ibid., 54-55.

the people and society, and a protector of the survival and wellbeing of the dispossessed in society.

Ela's emphasis is pragmatic. He urges African church leaders and theologians to emerge from the bare minimum of service delivery to actively journeying with the people in their thirst and hunger for real freedom; to join hands with the people in their striving to remove every obstacle that prevents them from living a full life. Referring to church's efforts to combat oppressive tendencies of dictatorial regimes with their deliberate mechanisms to stifle dissent and peaceful protest Ela asserts that:

> No mystifying rhetoric can dissimulate this reality. It is not only drinking water and animal protein that so many Africans are missing. They lack a space of freedom, as well, a space where they may speak without muzzles and without censure, where they may speak without the risk of compromising their families or of bringing down a thunderbolt on a forest village or indeed on an entire region of the country. At times it seems as if the only thing so many beg for is simply the freedom to express themselves without having to fear for their future and without having to fear for their relatives or friends.[151]

The precarious nature of the situation in which the people of Africa live ought to provoke a strong response from all who are committed to bear witness in their lives to the suffering and resurrection of Christ. The situation is one where divergent views are suppressed, journalists and human rights activists are tortured, jailed without trial and murdered, social media is severely controlled, and all sorts of crimes committed by those allied to the governing system go unpunished. And in these scenarios the church remains the only hope for the down-trodden people.[152] It is not enough therefore to provide services – health, water, education - without giving due attention to attacking the socio-economic and political machinations that are the root cause of the misery and deprivation of the African people.[153]

Ela is cognisant of the tremendous service the church has done as intervention initiatives to alleviate suffering and misery in the absence of the governments' services. However, this kind of intervention has received criticism for anesthetizing or diverting the people's

[151] AC, 75.
[152] Ibid., 76-77.
[153] MF, 82

consciousness away from finding real solutions to their ordeals through resistance or revolutionary actions. To avoid these accusations and to be intent on fulfilling its obligation, the ministry of the church must go beyond the sanctuary and the filling of gaps in certain dire humanitarian conditions. It is called to champion the transformation of human life. It must focus its attention on the problems of society such as leadership crises, denial of freedom, humanitarian emergencies, injustice, conflicts, corruption, poverty and all socio-economic evils that have kept the African continent paralysed and hostage. Referring to involvement in the reformation of the society, Ela made the following forceful appeal to African Christians:

> Christians cannot be indifferent to this problematic. It invites them to effectuate a basic change of direction in their reflection and their commitment. They are called upon to take the African's problems seriously. Only through an active but humble involvement in the dynamic of African society will they be able to live and proclaim Jesus Christ as the ultimate Liberator.[154]

Ela thinks that in this commitment the church will assume a distinct African personality and arrive at a new grasp of its evangelical mission, not as a western church, but a church that is rooted in the life of the African people, in their particular predicaments and aspirations for daily life. But this commitment, Ela believes, cannot be achieved unless the African church has freedom and room for independent action. He laments the dependency syndrome afflicting the church in Africa as evidenced in its reliance on the western world in economic and leadership provision. This has stifled any independent innovation in theological reflection and pastoral praxis in Africa.[155] The African Christians must create their own forms of existence as church and be able to interpret the gospel in the light of their history and of the actual conditions under which they live their lives.

Taking the above into perspective, Ela warns that the Christian faith must find answers to the African people's problems as they experience them in their context or else it becomes something of folklore as it has been pictured by some critical scholars. Nonetheless Ela acknowledges the difficulties involved: the church is constantly pressed from two sides, from the universal church demanding conformity to universalisation of doctrine, and from the

[154] AC, 87.
[155] Ibid., 107-109.

African nation states governments confining the church's competence exclusively to spiritual matters. All these forces work to disorient the church and distract it from giving the attention that it ought to the element which in fact ought to serve as the starting point for any authentic theological reflection and praxis of faith, namely, the situations in which people live their lives. Notwithstanding all these obstacles, Ela contends that the only way for the African church to go is to take up the burden of reflecting on the social condition of the African. Such attentiveness to the African context will evoke new reading of the bible and prompt the church to revise its thinking about its practice and its institutions.[156]

3.2.3. Situating the Church in Context

Ela strongly believes that if it is to survive the church in Africa has no choice but to make the Christian faith relevant to the actual situation of the African people. An imported Christianity that does not resonate with the African souls, does not challenge or even address their existential condition will remain foreign to the people and will therefore be regarded as some theory that falls outside the scope of the daily concerns of their lives. To illustrate his dissatisfaction with the church in Africa Ela takes strong issue with what is considered the heart of Christian belief and life: The Eucharistic celebration. He observes that in the African context where meal is so central in people's lives, the sacred species of bread and wine for the Eucharistic meal are not taken from what the African people have produced. Ela formulates this concern in the form of crucial questions which are perturbing:

> How is bread to be the fruit of the earth "fruits of the earth and the work of human hands" in a socioeconomic context where raising millet so deeply marks the life of mountaineers in North Cameroon who have learned to cultivate the very crags in order to survive? Why should the church ignore the joys and tribulations of the Kirdi to live in solidarity with the peasants of Europe alone?[157]

In Ela's view, such scenarios make the church in Africa dependent on external factors while remaining indifferent to the concrete concerns and plights of the people. The tendency to look outside for prescriptive formulae and what to do is the main cause for the lack of vigour and innovation within the church in Africa because it weakens its capacity to respond to the

[156] MF, 138.
[157] AC, 4.

challenges within its vicinity. The total and exclusive reliance on what is imposed from the outside of Africa, and the disdain for what is from within, ultimately leaves glossed over and unanswered the questions and dilemmas specific to the African context. Ela warns that because it was not rooted in the life of the indigenous people the church in North Africa naturally collapsed with the Fall of the Roman Empire. To avoid a repeat of such a collapse the Church must strive to be an essential element in people's lives.[158]

African Christians in whatever they do are caught up and imprisoned in a web of predicaments from which they are striving to free themselves. Therefore, the basic inspiration for any preoccupation, be it as the level of reflection or action is inescapably about life with its joys, aspirations, anxieties and hope. That is why Ela thinks that confining the message of the gospel, as in the received tradition, to the doctrine of sin, sacraments and grace jeopardises its liberative dimension. In fact, it can be argued that traditional discourse of this nature imparts a sense of guilt and inadequacy that instead of inspiring confidence and courage weighs down on people's conscience encouraging them to resign themselves voluntarily to inferiority status, marginalisation and exploitation, thus closing against them the door of hope. Notwithstanding the dialectics of oppression and liberation, suffering and joy that permeate the Christian revelation, Ela posits that ultimately faith is always fostered and sustained around the liberating God, the one who liberates people from the servitude of oppression and slavery and gives them the freedom and dignity of the children of God.[159] In this respect the ultimate goal of catechesis and Christian discourse, Ela thinks, ought not to be around suffering and misery, but the power of the resurrection of Christ.

Appealing to the incarnation as the paradigm of mission and planting of church, Ela re-iterates that in order to bring about the liberation of those under the yoke of slavery, Jesus entered their world and experienced their suffering through his passion, cross and death on the cross, thereby earning them relief and salvation. In the same way, it is important that in society where grain of cereals and survival form the central concerns of the people, the questions of faith cannot afford to disregard such key factors. Therefore Ela recommends that "peasant reading of the bible" be adopted just as Jesus spoke in plain terms about realities that affected people's lives and with which they had natural familiarity.[160] As a benchmark, the test for African theology is not to run after or get engrossed in sophisticated philosophical

[158] AC, 9-11.
[159] MF, 102-103.
[160] Ibid., 94, 111.

ideas of western intellectualism but to construct language and symbols that speak to the African people in their social and cultural milieu. African theology is therefore challenged to "liberate the gospel so that it can become the leaven of liberation in a social-religious context where we discover that the God of Jesus Christ refuses to accept the role the church has assigned to him, by sanctifying powers which, in fact, he opposes".[161]

Ela demands that African theology must strive to extricate itself from the bonds of conservatism and all repressive tendencies that, in the name of universality, have the result of distracting the church from the people's daily struggles to respond to the challenges of life. To do this, the African church must have the boldness to advance a subversive witness and adapt its own ideology-free methods of analysis that will contradict the false and deceptive narratives that are always presented in the social media as the best solutions to Africa's problems. And this kind of witness is only possible when the church is in direct touch and accompanying the people in their arduous life's journey. This is the only true and authentic way of witness where the church lives with the people – the jobless, hungry, homeless, hungry, marginalised – and breathes an ambience of freshness and hope to the miserable grass root communities. In faithfulness to the above desired path, problems to form subjects for theological reflections in Africa and praxis ought to come from contextual Christian experience and not those traditional themes for which there are already numerous ready-made answers. In this way the church will be enabled to give adequate answers to the questions raised by African Christians and thus show itself worthy of the great hope that is placed in the church in Africa.[162]

Ela is convinced that by constantly asking ourselves the question of relevance of faith in the gospel, we shall be able to beat new directions and orientation not only in asking questions of faith but also probe into the church's practice. This is the only way to salvage Christianity from syncretic tendencies which come about because the way Christian faith has been taught and handed on in Africa has made it appear impotent in answering people's problems.[163] This strategy will enable the African church and theologians to broaden their scope of understanding the gospel and integrate the social reality of the African people that is not accounted for in the church's traditional dispensation. However, Ela is careful to note that this task of African theology is not arbitrarily carried out but is done through re-reading the

[161] MF, 112.
[162] Ibid., 118-121.
[163] Ibid., 139-140.

Bible in the light of African realities and ways of life peculiar to the African people and their contexts.[164]

Furthermore, Ela thinks that the traditional emphasis of church preaching on individual salvation of souls does not resonate with the deeply-held African belief and social life whereby a person's life can only blossom in immediate family and community contexts. This observation is crucially pertinent to the African situation whereby in circumstances of sickness, insecurity, poverty, and in the virtual absence of any social security systems from the state government for its people, the close members of one's family and the community shoulder together the responsibility for the survival and wellbeing of the affected member. Preaching the individual salvation of souls therefore risks denying or undermining the role of the social fabric that has ensured the survival and existence of both individual and society. Thus, any attempt at building up Christian communities must ensure that the African social bonds that provide cohesion of members are enhanced because these have proved reliable weapons of survival in difficult moments in the history of every community in Africa. This solidarity of the African people is needed even now more than before in the fight against all the anti-life forces that are both internal and external to Africa.[165]

3.2.4. Formation in African Theology

If a new path is to be taken to bring about an African dimension to African theology, Ela posits, that there must be a conscious formation program that will orient African church leaders and theologians to achieving the desired goal of having a church or a theology that addresses the particular conditions in which Africans live. Right away, Ela sees that the concerns for the poor ought to be incorporated or in fact form the core of the seminary formation modules.[166] The seminary formation syllabus that concentrates its focus mainly on the training of pastors for parishes without due attention to the training of priests for the need of chaplaincy to the youths, prisons, schools, hospitals and government institutions fall short of real African pastoral needs. All these need the presence of the church just as much as the parishes do. Such formation modules will not fail to incorporate crucial issues that must not escape attention in the African context today: questions of justice, peace, reconciliation, human rights, civic duties and obligations, liberation, democracy among others. Although these themes are very significant for the contemporary African context, it is unfortunate that

[164] MF, 143.
[165] Ibid., 146.
[166] Ibid., 122.

they are never adequately treated just because they are not normally enshrined in the traditional modules of church planting and mission. The purpose of mission in the African church must not be restricted to *salus animarum* – salvation of souls – as it is inscribed in traditional modules of church's mission. The church in Africa must be concerned with salvation and total liberation of the human person, of society and the material universe. In this way the African church leaders and theologians will make it incumbent on themselves to deliberate on the African socio-economic and political problems not as ancillary to their mission's mandate but as their primary duty and responsibility to their communities.

Because of the wider and inclusive scope of fields of preparation of leaders and theologians for the church in Africa, the subject for reflection or discourse will not consist primarily of abstract conceptions but will focus more on the ordinary conversations about God among the people in their daily lives. African theologians' first task must therefore be to listen and discern what faith means to the people in their struggles to overcome the powers of oppression and the elements of death.[167] They must be trained in such a way that their roles go beyond mere expression of thoughts from the many bishops' pastoral letters or exhortations throughout Africa. The task of the church leaders and theologians must include more importantly being immersed in the life situation and experience of the people. Furthermore, their role should not be limited to the church and things pertaining to God's worship, sacraments, preaching, catechesis, but should also touch all the details of world affairs that have oppressive effect on the people. Consequently, Ela concludes that "the appeal to convert individuals cannot be separated from the transformation of unjust structures".[168]

To be able to forge an African church and theology, African scholars must be prepared to accept and undergo some inevitable conflict as a price for departing from the enforced universalism that suffocates any emerging view of particularity that begs for reforms. Ela sees that persecutions and trials of authentic and passionate protagonists of African liberation theology are imminent, but he urges all to accept them as inevitable cost of discipleship.[169] Because of the powerful control over innovative dynamism of African church and theology by the established structures of the church, there is need for a corresponding revolutionary force, seeds of which can be sowed in formation houses and educational institutions. It is

[167] MF, 129.
[168] Ibid., 130.
[169] Ibid., 132.

obvious to deduce from Ela's arguments that the lack of revolutionary stance of the church in Africa is partly because many church leaders and theologians who have come out of the rigid formation programs are bereft of the level of audacity needed to tackle the peculiar African pastoral challenges and are, therefore incapable of undertaking substantial initiatives. This would not be a surprise because there cannot be an orientation to critical thinking in an atmosphere where the entire training is centred around passing on norms and decrees for standardising and centralising church practice in the name of universality. The plea Ela makes is that the African church needs to be sufficiently released from official ecclesial constraints to exercise the degree of thought and action that would encourage the people to freely encounter the Word of God and find answers to their life's situation in it. [170]

The traditional models of the church on which theology has been constructed need to be re-examined and re-evaluated against the ever-changing circumstances of life in the African continent. The contention is that it is only through this exercise that new models capable of addressing Africa's situation can be developed. Africa's social questions need now to find as large a place in formation modules as dogmatic disciplines if the church is to be relevant and credible to the African people. Ela thinks that ignoring the social questions in the formation of future leaders and theologians undermines hope for the future of the church in Africa. In line with this argument, he emphatically asserts that, "as long as church buildings are filled and yet no questions are asked about the commitment of Christians to social problems, the decision-making groups, which influence the future by their plans for social development projects, will remain beyond the influence of the church".[171]

The theological formation of ministers designed to guide Christian communities and congregations ought not to be only for "prayers and singing, but also to show itself united in all things, to protect itself, and to assume the salvation of person".[172] If the church has to hope for a better African society, it must participate through its formation programs in building it up by cultivating values and arousing interest in the social issues facing the people. This task is not limited to seminaries and convents but should indeed imbue the entire curriculum of catholic education in Africa. In this way, the seeds for subversive ideas and the steps taken to bring them to fruition will be constantly nurtured to counter the evil forces that have been buttressed by the political establishment in Africa's nation states. Ela concludes

[170] MF, 116.
[171] Ibid., 122.
[172] Ibid., 131 quoted from Kabanga Songasonga, *Tous Ensemble* (Lent 1981), 6-7.

therefore that any plan for undertaking evangelisation must include the goal of promoting human wellbeing for Jesus revealed himself as both the saviour of souls and defender of the helpless and hope of the poor.[173]

3.2.5. Speaking of God in the Church in Africa

It can be gleaned from all the theological works of Ela that he is striving to answer this basic question which he poses to himself and to his fellow African theologians: "how could I dare to express my faith in a culture marked by civilisation of the hills and millet?" This question is related to the compound of questions he asks concomitantly: "What is the cutting edge of the gospel that can be most directly accessible and meaningful for these people? How shall we live our faith, and thus create around us a desire for the living God? Don't we have to convert ourselves before preaching conversion to others?"[174] Ela sees it as crucial, to make Christian faith and theology meaningful from the perspective of African lives, tradition and history. The need to express Christian faith in symbols and language appropriate to the concrete life situation of the people is a challenge to the church in Africa. Reflecting on the urgency of this task for African theology, Ela forcefully states,

> No opportunity should be missed to translate the newness of the Gospel. At every moment I must be alert for something new that can spring into life. I must constantly live with my ears pricked up to catch the faintest murmurs of the Spirit who speaks to the church in the context of the African.[175]

According to Ela, African theology must speak and touch people's daily struggles and aspirations; it must integrate their lamentations and joys. This new task of theology puts demand on theologians to carry out analysis of African situations - which normally are not shared or understood by their western counterparts – and give them due importance in theological reflection. Such reflection must include socio-economic and political elements, popular ideologies and agenda which tend to exploit, alienate, impoverish and keep the African people hostages to every kind of enslavement. African theology will therefore not be

[173] MF, 133.
[174] Ibid., 5.
[175] Ibid., 6.

doing justice to itself and to the people of Africa if it glosses over these realities to find explanations for the defects, disorders and suffering of the African people in other-worldly considerations which are beyond their rich and participation. In this regard, Ela believes that for serious theological undertaking in Africa, "first we must take note of the structures of an ill-made world that contradicts the will of God for humanity and the world, beginning with the ravages of these structures on individuals and human groups".[176]

African theology, Ela argues, should not limit itself to mere verbalism, but go beyond to include journeying with the African people wherever they are "with their feet in the mud".[177] It must rise above giving too easy answers to Africa's predicament – in the forms of resignation to the will of God and offering of charity. The gospel is to be presented in such a way that it inspires the African people "to ask hard questions and to become participants with power to change their own living conditions".[178] The hope is that enlightened by Christian faith, the African people should build trust, solidarity between themselves and bring about unity of purpose to achieve better understanding of themselves, their existence and mission, and in this way venture into joint initiatives and undertakings, reject repressive forces and build together the desired African society on the pattern of the kingdom of God.

Before I move to the next chapter, I have to make two important clarifications concerning my treatment of Ela's liberation theology. Firstly, my interest in his liberating insights does not exonerate him from criticisms. Like any theologian, Ela's theology is not flawless. My criticism of his liberative ideas will be by way of countering his theological persuasion with Balthasar's kenotic theology. Furthermore, although Ela's theology has many features in common with Latin American liberation theology, I consider that it would not be realistic and justifiable to subject his theological insights to trial in the crucible of the criticisms and warnings of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) as contained in the two documents previously mentioned. There is no doubt, Ela's basic presuppositions, method, style motivation, context, social realities are different from those of the Latin American liberation theologians. In the final analysis however, Ela's liberation theology cannot escape CDF's warnings and criticisms because Balthasar's critical stance itself, as it will eventually be seen, is drawn from the same spirit, namely of traditional conservative theology, of the time.

Secondly, after the writings of Ela and others in the 1980s, there developed in the 1990s an argument by some African theologians advocating for a shift of emphasis from liberation to

[176] MF, 81.
[177] Ibid., 83.
[178] Ibid., 91.

reconstruction motif, in what they termed as African theology of reconstruction.[179] The main proponents of this trajectory are J.N.K Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio.[180] The thrust of their argument is that "African has entered a new historical period ushered in by the end of three vicious systems of oppression- institutional racism, formal colonisation and cold war tutelage."[181] The African theology of reconstruction is however criticised by many African theologians and scholars. It has been argued that it is uncritical, does not have a theological basis, and glosses over oppressive forces in Africa.[182] In fact a closer look at the arguments advanced by reconstruction theologians reveals that it begins on a false assumption that Africa has come of age and is free from the shackles of all oppressive forces. In addition, reconstruction theology is self-contradictory in its argument that the Exodus motif of liberation should not be appropriated on the ground that it is from different historical context while on its part it employs Nehemiah as its classical text. Furthermore, the ideas it espouses remain at the theoretical level with inadequate liberative impetus to enable the realisation of the agenda it purports to effectuate. Similarly, the accent of reconstruction, it has been pointed out, is put more on the social reconstruction with no corresponding regard for personal reconstruction.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have traced the origins of African liberation theology by way of taking stock of the internal and external historical events and developments which occasioned and inspired its birth. I have argued that the shift of emphasis by African theologians from cultural concerns to socio-economic and political concerns was inspired, in part, by the works of Latin American liberation theologians. Their commitment of life, unity, hard work, and resilience of these Latin American theologians have been highlighted because they incentivised the acceptability and spread of liberation theology during its flourishing years, as something which African liberation theologians can learn from. This has been purposely stressed to draw attention to the fact that liberation theology flourished when its theologians were engaged in pastoral praxis and concrete historical projects. Once the emphasis shifted to academic and political preoccupation, liberation theology started to experience decline. In addition to the inspiration it received from Latin American liberation theology, I have equally

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[179] Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War*, 40.
[180] Their seminal works include the following: Villa-Vincencio, *Theology of Reconstruction: Nation Building and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War*; *Christian Theology of Social Reconstruction* (Nairobi: Acton, 2003).
[181] Mugambi, "Forward" in *Theology of Reconstruction: Explanatory Essays*, eds. Mary Gertui and Elizabeth Obeng (Nairobi: Acton, 1999).
[182] Ragies Masiiwa, "African Theology of Reconstruction: The Painful Realities and Practical Options," *Exchange* 38 no. 1 (2009), 94.

traced the birth and development of African liberation theology to the African political movements of 1990s, and an African theological strand of inculturation. After establishing this connectedness, I have argued for continuity between inculturation theology and liberation theology in Africa because otherwise Christianity would continue to be foreign and superficial to people's existence. Discussing the antecedent movements and strands of African theology helps to frame liberation theology as a distinguished theological trend with particular principles.

This chapter has provided the social and religious landscape of Africa which is the field of contact for the gospel message. The realities that African people experience may be specific to the African continent. They demand special attention if the idea that God encounters and saves people in their historical and social embeddedness is to be ascertained. The contingent history is salvation history and should be taken with due seriousness. Therefore, African's social concerns should not be glossed over too easily in the name of spiritual or heavenly wellbeing.

I have drawn at length on the theology of Jean Marc Ela and discussed his theological ideas and commitments. His articulation of the African's plight and suffering is compellingly credible because his reflection is from within the lived experience of the people. The description he gives of the African reality legitimises the kind of theology he advocates. I concur with him that for the church to continue to be credible in Africa, it must stop turning a blind eye to the reality of African people. Ela's theological thought which I have discussed here will be taken up again in the subsequent chapters for critique alongside Balthasar's kenotic theology. However, before I proceed to these discussions, I will first introduce and discus the theology of kenosis in the next chapter. While acknowledging the urgency and viability of African liberation theology, I have pointed out that, considering the fact that this theological strand shares much in common with other forms of liberation theology, it does not fail to succumb to certain dangers that provoked the warning and criticism launched against the general liberation theology movement. In this respect, I will propose that kenosis forms its underpinning principle. At the same time however, the criticisms against liberation theology have not been specifically applied and analysed against African liberation theology in this chapter. The critiques in relation to the latter will be discussed against Balthasar's kenotic theology in the fourth chapter.

By now, it should be evident that African liberation theology is in great part an *ad intra* reflection and conversation, and less of an apologetic appeal to the world. It is a prophetic voice calling the church in Africa to conversion from its indifference and foreignness to being present and attentive to the reality of the African people. I contend that it is only in this way that it can be relevant to the plight and misery of the African poor. However, this critical stance against the church for its inability and impotence is followed by expressed expectation of the church, which is perceived as a powerful institution, capable of mobilising its internal resources to effect the needed changes and transformation in Africa.

CHAPTER TWO

GOD, KENOSIS AND LIBERATION

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is rather modest. It will provide the historical and systematic developments in the theology of kenosis with a specific interest in the different nuances and the contribution it has given to modern theological conversations, particularly the theology of liberation. Ultimately, getting into some depth of kenosis will help us to have an appreciation of the backdrop against which Balthasar expounds his kenotic theory. Furthermore, entering into the kenotic debates enables us to have an appreciation for Balthasar's stance and thus justify the option and argument that I will make for his kenotic ideas as offering a legitimate underpinning for African liberation theology. This task will involve tracing the contours, the motivations and argumentations of different moments and frameworks of theological thought.

It is important to point out already from the outset that although kenosis is a key feature in the gospels, it came to prominence as theological debate in the second half of the 19th century. The debate started among German Lutheran theologians and then was taken up in mainland Europe before spreading into England and Scotland. After this, the theological attention for kenosis declined partly due to a shift in theological interest into the Historical Jesus Research. In recent times, there is a resurgence of theology of kenosis and it is increasingly becoming popular among theologians from a variety of Christian denominations.

Kenotic theologians of the 19th century were motivated by the need to free Christological discourse from an ontological framework, in order to recover the biblical testimonies inherent in Christology, and thereby also to recover Jesus' humanity that, according to them, had been stifled by the framing of theology in Greek metaphysical concepts. Thus, kenotic theologians were seeking to respond to the critique of the social and philosophical world with its interest in psychology and culture and thus providing threads of logical consistencies in defence of Christological affirmations. Furthermore, the motivation behind kenotic theology also rests in the fact that it seeks to legitimize a theology of the suffering and cross of Jesus Christ. This way, the concept of kenosis privileges Christology as a common denominator and as a foundation for other theological disciplines, to the inclusion of the theology of liberation theology, which is the interest of this dissertation.

Aware that kenosis is a broad and contested subject, I should like at this juncture to make some clarifications that will help delineate the scope and limitation of my employment of the concept.

1. DEFINITION, SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

1.1. DEFINITION

The theology of kenosis is mainly derived from Paul's letter to the Philippians 2. 6-8:

> Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Taking the above text as being the *locus classicus* of the theology of kenosis, it does not mean by kenosis the Son of God ceased being divine and radically became human. This position is affirmed by Stephen Evans in the introduction note of a joint kenotic project, *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self Emptying of God,* on behalf of the team of kenotic theologians.[1] Kenosis is then meant, the pre-existent Word of God, the second person of the God-head by becoming human, renounced his divine attributes. These theologians of kenosis posit that although God was ontologically present in Christ, as a human subject, he experienced a gradual growth of awareness of his own divinity.[2] The theory therefore does not digress from the incarnational belief that Christ was fully divine and fully human, but it adds that he deprived himself of the glory that was proper to his being God.[3] Divesting himself of divinity signifies the relinquishment of some or all of divine prerogatives, such as "His omnipotence, His divine omniscience, His omnipresence".[4]

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[1] Stephen Evans, "Understanding Jesus and the Christ as Human and Divine," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-emptying of God,* ed. Stephen Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4-5: The principal contributors to this work are specially, Stephen Evans, Stephen T. Davis, Edward T. Oakes, Rinald Feenstra.

[2] David Brown, *Divine Humanity: Kenosis Explored and Defended* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 23.

[3] Joseph Komonchak, "Kenosis", in *The New Dictionary of Theology,* eds. Mary Collins and Dermont Lane (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1990), 556.

[4] J.M Carmody, "Kenosis," in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 2nd Edit, ed. Thomas Carson and Joann Cerrito (Detroit, New York, et al: Catholic University of America, 2003), 143.

It suffices to note that there is no general agreement among kenotic theologians as to what elements or features should be taken as normative for any Christological discourse to be considered kenotic. This is because the Christ-event that grounds the theology of kenosis covers a wide spectrum of elements which can be summarised under the two categories of the events of the incarnation and the passion/death. For one reason or the other, one chooses to be selective of some aspects and give them elaborate emphasis over others. Taking survey of the arguments of kenotic theologians, they can be classified under two broad overtones: radical and moderate kenotic theology.

Strict or radical kenotic theologians like David Brown regard kenosis as an incarnational model that postulates that the Son of God abandoned his characteristic divine powers and therefore experienced self-emptying by becoming human being with a beginning of life no less than a foetus.[5] This way, the Two-Nature Christology defined at Chalcedon is stretched to its limits by asserting that God in Jesus was not only truly God and truly human, but that he truly became man. However, this does not mean that the kenotic model is a deviation from the Chalcedon two-nature Christology. Instead it maintains that the Son of God in the incarnation was in two natures, but successively: He was God and then became human. This is unlike the Chalcedonian definition that ambiguously says that the Son was truly God and truly human without clearly asserting that he became human.

A rather moderate kenotic version considers the incarnation as a self-limitation or humility of God and not rather a radical break in his divine being. This version of theology of kenosis presupposes that "in the incarnation Jesus Christ emptied himself by giving up those divine properties that are inconsistent with being truly human while retaining sufficient divine properties to remain truly divine; he gave up those common human properties that are inconsistent with being truly divine but retained sufficient human properties to remain truly human".[6]

All in all, kenosis is at the heart of Christology,[7] and its resurgence in the nineteenth century can be considered a continuation of the Christological debates of the early church.[8]

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[5] David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1985), 231.
[6] Stephen Davis, "Jesus Christ: Saviour or Guru?," in *Encountering Jesus: A Debate on Christology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 53.
[7] John B. Lounibos, *Self-Emptying of Christ and the Christian: Three Essays on Kenosis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 56: "Kenosis itself is another way to express the incarnation and invites the Christian to a life of self-giving."
[8] The Council of Nicaea with a defence for the full divinity; the Council of Constantinople with a defence of the full humanity, and the Council of Ephesus with a defence of the unity of two natures in the one person. Frances

For although it is said that the council of Chalcedon had the conclusive say on the Christological disputes, dissatisfaction with the definition continued. For example, the East regarded the definition of "two natures" as being compatible to the position of the Monophytists.[9]

The contention of the kenotic model of the 19th century has been that, while admitting that the Son truly became human, the concept of kenosis helps in illuminating what it precisely means when we say that salvation is through the Son's sympathy[10] with the sinful humanity. The implication is that to be truly sympathetic to humanity, the Son had to enter into the real experience of what it means to be human in order to save the fallen humanity from within.[11] This has a serious consequence in that the *Logos* had to become human so that he could act in psycho-somatic unity of mind and body. That is to say, the Son of God did not only limit his divinity, but he was God who became human being and experienced the conditions of human beings.[12]

I have considered it important to make the above distinction because it impacts on the caution with which one must approach the kenotic theory. It is a broad subject and can be appropriated or appealed to not only in theological discourse but in different disciplines as well. Since my study of kenotic theology is for the purpose of arriving at kenotic liberation theology, I will not pursue these distinctions although I will distance myself as much as possible from taking the strict kenotic position because it tends to dwell extensively on the incarnational arguments of kenosis to the detriment of the soteriological significance that forms the main drive of this study.

1.2. SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

Notwithstanding the different shadows and twists of theology of kenosis, I will argue in this study that kenotic theology is a way of speaking of the incarnation in which the pre-existent *logos*, the Son of God, by becoming human in the incarnation surrendered some of his divine

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Young, *God's Presence: A Contemporary Recapitulation of Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013).

[9] Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 557-91;

[10] David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 1985), 246.

[11] Ibid., 246-247.

[12] Some kenotic theologians have rather radical kenotic theory which postulate a change in the nature of God in the incarnation. David Brown in pursuing logical coherence in the Incarnation, has the temptation to fall into this category. Brown, *The Divine Trinity*, 107-109; 250-251.

attributes. By divine attributes, I mean the powers to be, and not the actual possession of power to be for example, omniscience. The conviction is that, although the Son of God deigned low in order to accomplish his salvific mission, he nonetheless did not lose his divinity. He could give up the power not to exercise the privileges of his divinity and relied on the powers of the Godhead during the incarnation. Stephen Evans has argued with this distinction, the contradiction that arises in divesting essential attributes from a being is in a way overcome, for a being that chooses not to exercise that which pertains to it does not mean it does not actually possess it.[13] In this way, kenotic theology does not contradict the Chalcedonian definition because it maintains the unity of the one person with divine and human nature, and therefore defends Chalcedon, making it more intelligible.

At this juncture, I should like to point out that this study is not a complete historical investigation of kenosis, nor is it a defence of its coherence or accuracy over and against other incarnational models. Rather it is an exploration and assessment of kenotic arguments through different theological moments with the aim of filtering out from these arguments their fruitfulness and lack of for liberation theology in chapters four and five. And because the aim of my study of kenotic theology is heuristic and not a constructive proposal for a kenotic theology, I will limit my scope of kenosis to the discussions on the divine self-limitation in the incarnation, the passion and the cross.

In what follows I will give the varying understandings of kenosis as it has been perceived from the scriptures and the Fathers through the medieval to the modern debates. However, this exploration is limited in the sense that I will not get into the depth of the exegesis of kenotic biblical texts as this would demand the application of certain analytical tools as well as devoting more time which would span beyond the timeframe available to me for this research. In addition, I rely on secondary sources and not on the primary works in the sense that they were written by the Fathers of the early centuries. Moreover, my access to the related body of literature in this section is limited to the English translations. Finally, it is also important to clarify that in this explorative venture, my focus is mainly on the thematic discussions of kenosis and not on its chronological development in history.

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[13] Evans, "The Self-Emptying of Love: Some Thoughts on Kenotic Christology," in *The Incarnation*, eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 254-255.

2. AFFIRMATION AND DEVELOPMENT

2.1. THE BIBLICAL TESTIMONY

The word kenosis is a noun that comes from the verb *kenoo*, meaning 'to empty'. It finds its locus in the biblical text of Philippians 2,5-11, and when specifically applied to Christ in verse 7, it means emptying or powerlessness.[14] Apart from Paul's letter to the Philippians, there are other biblical sources that affirm that the Son of God simultaneously exhibited certain characteristics that would not be compatible to his divine nature such as the experience of human emotions, suffering and death,[15] which are indicative of the idea that the Son of God in the incarnation did not always manifest his divine attributes alone. God in the incarnation experienced human limitations: he became hungry, thirsty and tired (John 4.6); he was tempted (Mat 4.1-44; Heb 4.15); he wept (Jn 11.35), he was ignorant (Mk 5.30; 13.32), and he died (Mk 15.36).[16] because of the pervasiveness of kenotic language and images in the gospel of Mark, Lucien Richard even thinks that the gospel of Mark is a long commentary on 2 Philippians,[17] because "at the centre of Mark's story there stands a theology of Jesus' suffering and death that recalls the kenotic theme of Philippians 2."[18] In fact some gospel passages are indicative of abeyance of divine powers.[19] In this line of thought, kenotic discussions do not get their legitimacy and cogency from isolated and scanty Pauline passages, but kenosis in all stripes are illustrations of a wider biblical witnesses.[20] The inescapable consequence of this position would therefore be that there was in some sense a change in the nature of the Son of God as opposed to divine immutability conception that dictated Christological developments from the Fathers to the medieval periods.[21]

2.2. THE LOGIC OF THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH: SUPPRESSION AND PARADOXES

[14] David Williams, *Kenosis of God: The Self-Limitation of God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2009), 25-26.
[15] David Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 34.
[16] Stephen Davis, "Jesus Christ: Saviour and Guru?" in *Encountering Jesus: A Debate on Christology*, 47.
[17] Lucien Richard, *Christ: The Self-Emptying of God* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1996), 62.
[18] Ibid., 63.
[19] Brown, *Divine Humanity: Kenosis Explored and Defended* (London: SCM press, 2011), 4.
[20] Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, 2nd Edition (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 469.
[21] Williams, *Kenosis of God*, 35.

Much has been written by the Fathers and the theologians that followed in the tradition about the subject of the self-limitation of the Son of God in becoming human. However, this is always connected to the incarnation and not as a theory in its own respect. The kenotic theme, despite being at the centre of Christological debates and controversies, was often glossed over and overshadowed, and consequently was never treated separately. The theology of kenosis has come to be taken seriously as a theory or a model as such only in later development beginning from the second half of the nineteenth century.

Despite the frequent references to kenosis in the New Testament, the church fathers attributed such a high degree of perfection to the Son to the extent that he was not only a perfect human being but also equal to the creator. They maintained that any self-limitation of the Son could not cause any change in his divinity – so Jesus retained such divine attributes as his omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence.[22] They compartmentalised the divine and human natures of the Son into fixed philosophical categories to the effect that becoming man on the incarnation could not affect the divine nature of the pre-existent *Logos*-Son.[23] Even in their acceptance of the self-limitation of the Son, they careful argued that neither the divine or the human nature was taken up into the other – in accordance with the Chalcedonian formula in which the unity of true divinity and true humanity was upheld.[24] To remain faithful to the Chalcedonian definition, the Fathers and the theologians that followed articulated a position that did not in any way jeopardised the full divinity of Christ specially as this would easily be perceived as Arianism.[25] In order to lay a firm foundation for this, they interpreted the 'form of God' (*morphe theou*) metaphysically as 'nature' (*ousia*, or *physis*) so that Jesus Christ, the *Logos* was the pre-existent Son of God, of the same substance with the Father. And in the incarnation, he remained God without allowing the limitation of humanity to touch his divinity. Consequently, Jesus did not experience any change in the divine nature. The Fathers were unanimous in their articulation of the immutability of God and interpreted the kenosis of Christ as only the veiling of the divinity in which the Son was eternally begotten.

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[22] Williams, *Kenosis of God*, 39.
[23] Richard, *Christ: The Self-Emptying of God*, 73.
[24] Williams, *Kenosis of God*, 39.
[25] Richard, *Christ: The Self-Emptying*, 73-74. In their battle against Arianism, the Fathers – both Latin and Greek – did not want to say anything about Christ that would smack of any tendency that denied his divinity. So, they keenly asserted his divinity and did not allow an element of condescension in him. The understanding of Jesus according to the flesh was overshadowed by the understanding of him according to the Spirit.

In what follows I will demonstrate with some examples how the Fathers grappled with the theological challenge of maintaining the standard they had set for themselves in the definition of the two-nature Christology. It suffices to mention that they paved the way along which later Fathers and theologians trod until the sixteenth century. The two-nature Christology became a dogmatic framework against which the orthodoxy or unorthodoxy of subsequent theologians and church leaders were to be tested. It is important to delve into the Fathers' theology into some details because it will in a way help to suggest why the theology of kenosis was not popular among theologians, particularly catholic theologians through the subsequent ages that followed the Fathers. Furthermore, a study of the Fathers' views on kenosis might also give some intimation into why the institutional churches distanced themselves from a theology that was devoted to temporal and contingent human conditions, notably here for our consideration is the theology of liberation.

In tracing the kenotic theology of the Father, Sarah Coakley has established that one of the prominent church Fathers, Cyril of Alexandria, accepted the view that the Son in the incarnation maintained his full divinity with the characteristics such as omnipotence, omniscience that properly pertain to it.[26] According to him, the only begotten Son of God emptied himself and became man but not however "casting off what he was, but even though he became man by the assumption of flesh and blood he remained God in nature (*physis*) and in truth".[27] In this way, the pre-existent *Logos* formed the personal identity of Jesus Christ to the extent that the human nature assumed was as a mere extension of the spheres of the *Logos* and did not undergo any change to it.[28] Furthermore, Norris R.A affirms that according to Cyril, the Son of God who came down from above, emptied himself and took on the form of the slave, remained what he was, without any change or alteration to his nature whatsoever.[29] Frances Young remarks that "for Cyril, the creed demands the involvement of the *Logos* in the whole incarnational process, even though the manner of his uniting himself with the flesh is 'ineffable and inconceivable'".[30] Similarly, Lucien Richard attests to this position that in his use of the phrase "hypostatic union" Cyril expressed that in the incarnation, the Son though was in human nature remained divine; he did not leave aside his divinity in assuming humanity. And in speaking about the suffering of the Son, it is evident that Cyril attributed

[26] Sarah Coakley, *Powers, Submission: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 13-15.
[27] Richard, *Christ: The Self-Emptying of God*, 74.
[28] Sarah Coakley, "Does Kenosis Rest on a Mistake? Three Kenotic Models in Patristic Exegesis," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, 251.
[29] R.A Norris (ed & trans), *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 143.
[30] Frances Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 72.

the passion to his human nature but at the same time carefully added that, the *Logos* also suffered impassibly because a suffering with such a great redemptive effect could not be enlisted from merely the human nature.[31]

Richard has remarked that the same logic of the Fathers can be seen in Hilary who could not accept any degree of condensation in the Son. His conviction was that he who took on the human form was always in the form of God in which he was in the beginning. In his defence, even of such biblical passages that point to the kenosis of the Son, Hilary contends that, when Jesus asks his Father to glory him with the glory he has with him before the foundation of the world (Jn 17.5), he does so because it is what rightly belongs to him. The point of contention of Hilary, Richard observes, is that the Son retained his divinity and it is this to which the redemptive work is attributable. In line with this argument, Hilary in talking about the suffering of Jesus Christ buys into the impassibility of God by posting that the Son suffered in the flesh but did not have the nature to feel the pain.[32]

Similarly, Rinse Reeling Brouwer sees in Origen the attempt to defend the unchangeability of the divine nature of the Son of God by arguing that as God, the Son encompassed the heaven and the earth and therefore did not have to abandon whatever glory pertained to his divinity by condensing to the lowest depth of human conditions.[33]

According to Richard, Irenaeus exemplifies the commitment of the Fathers to give a logical presentation of the relationship between the Son and the Father in his assertion that that the Son is impassible by virtue of the fact that he proceeds from the Father who is impassible.[34] Irenaeus therefore shared in the Fathers' tendency to overstress the divinity of the Son and to minimise his humanity as far it took them. And because they identified Jesus more with his divinity, he was shrouded in the divine metaphysical attributes and therefore only activities consequent of such a nature would genuinely proceed from him as the *Logos*, the Son of God.

Furthermore, Richard sees in Clement of Alexandria the same struggle to maintain the divine nature of Christ over and above his human nature in the distinction he drew between what the divine and human natures are constituted and capable of respectively. From these

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[31] Richard, *Christ*: *The Self-Emptying of God*, 75.
[32] Ibid., 80.
[33] Rinse Reeling Brouwer, "Kenosis in Philippians 2:5-11 and in the History of Christian Doctrine," in *Letting Go: Rethinking Kenosis*, ed. Onno Zijlstra (Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, et al: Peter Lang, 2002), 84.
[34] Richard, *Christ: The Self Emptying of God*, 77.

distinctions, he arrived at the conclusion that being God, the *Logos* is immutable and impassible and therefore cannot participate in the attributes of the flesh: fear, desire, passion, suffering. This does not mean that Clement did not believe in the incarnation and the suffering of the Son, but rather he takes the suffering of Jesus Christ to be accidental to his important role of teaching and revealing the Father.[35]

Richard has established that like all others, Athanasius affirmed the paradoxical consubstantiality and unalterableness of Jesus Christ. According to him, the Son cannot be otherwise but eternal and unchangeable because he is of the same substance with the Father. Athanasius believed that the unchanging nature of the Son serves his redemptive role precisely because it is to this nature that God calls us and into which we must be transfigured in Christ.[36] At the same time, Athanasius admits of the weaknesses in the life of the Son, but he "attributes these creaturely weaknesses to the 'flesh', refusing to deduce from them that the *Logos* himself had a creaturely nature".[37]

To sum up the standpoint of the Fathers, it can be said that a framework for what would be an orthodoxy Christology had been set, and within which it would be impossible to divert without falling into condemnation or heresy. Nonetheless, the emphasis they laid on the divinity of the Son served to the detriment of his humanity.[38] The Fathers were more inclined to talk of the Son "taking on" the flesh and avoided the language of "becoming flesh".[39]

The Fathers struggled in different ways to delicately harmonise their positions with the defined orthodox framework. It suffices to note that the point of convergence for all the Fathers was the soteriological significance of the incarnation of the Son. For this reason, they interestingly almost came to the border of suggesting change in God, for example, God who becomes compassionate and suffers with humanity, and yet is incapable of suffering or any change. From a close observation, it can be gleaned that although the Fathers from the outset argued for the impassibility and immutability of God, they did so only as the function of their conviction in the soteriological significance of the Son's incarnation and the awareness of the

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[35] Richard, *Christ: The Self-Emptying of God*, 77.
[36] Ibid., 78.
[37] Young, *The Making of the Creeds*, 65-66.
[38] Brown, *The Divine Trinity*, 228-229: Athanasius denied the presence of human soul in Christ, while although Cyril accept it, he does not safeguard the human nature by positing an impersonal humanity in Christ; also confer Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* volume 1 (London: Mowbray, 1975), 376: According to Gregory of Nyssa, the human mind of Jesus was swallowed up into the divine like drop of vinegar in the ocean.
[39] Brouwer, "Kenosis in Philippians 2:5-11 and in the History of Christian Doctrine," 86.

erroneous mythological language in reference to God. No doubt, the themes of love, mercy, freedom, power abound in the theology of the fathers, with the result that redemptive actions of God, particularly in the incarnation and the cross, are functions of the divinity.[40]

2.3. THE POST-PATRISTIC TRADITION

Because the definitions of the councils were considered the orthodox theological positions, almost all theologians and doctors of the church that followed strove to harmonise their Christological positions within the defined boundaries or else they risked being bracketed heretics. Anton C. Pegis has remarked that St. Thomas Aquinas regarded those biblical passages whose depiction of God are associated with corporeality, times, change and succession as metaphorical. Aquinas maintained that no change or passivity could possibly be found in God.[41] This assertion is meant to resonate with the provided Christological definition that preserves the divine aspect which determines or shapes what is human. Taken this way, it is only when the human is connected to the divine that the former is ennobled to a perfection that is characteristic of the latter.[42] In specific reference to the relationship between the divine and human natures in Jesus, Aquinas distinguishes between real change and change '*secundum rationem*'. He observes that relationship engenders changes. Consequently, he contends that relationship can only be established in humans and not in God since there cannot be conceived a change in the latter. We can therefore talk of change in God only from our point of view as they arise from our thinking.[43]

In the same way, the post-Lutheran reformation theologians resolved to keep in line with the Chalcedonian definition. Despite the emphasis they placed on extreme vulnerability of Christ on the Cross, they nonetheless, held on to Christ's unchanged divine nature, and argued that kenosis could only be attributed to his human nature while his divine nature remained intact.[44] As observed by David R. Purves, "we are left with a divine nature that did not undergo kenosis, a very opposite of what the narrative seems to say in Philippians 2".[45]

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[40] Wolfgang Beinert and Francis Schussler Fiorenze (eds), *Handbook of Catholic Theology* (New York: Crossroads, 2000), 154.
[41] Anton C. Pegis, *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1945), 75.
[42] STH, 3a.2.5.
[43] STH, 3ae.2.7.
[44] Coakley, *Powers, Submission*, 17. Although they wanted to maintain the two natures of Christ, most often the divine nature always prevailed over the human and the former acted as the seed and originator of the Son's activities.
[45] David R. Purves, "Relating Kenosis to Soteriology: Implications for Christian Ministry Amongst Homeless people," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 35 (2013): 70-90, 78-79.

Notwithstanding the truth that the Christological starting point of the Fathers and those who followed in their tradition was the historical Jesus, and that affirmations of Nicaea and Chalcedon were in resonance with the biblical witness, there remains uneasiness in the Patristic Christological discourses and affirmations because of Greek philosophical categories they deployed are foreign to the New Testament testimony of Jesus' life.[46] Richard, in taking stock of the Christological affirmation of the Fathers and their successors observes that they are characterised by paradoxical juxtapositions in the attempt to reconcile the content (biblical narratives) on the one hand, and the language and symbols (Greek Philosophy) on the other.[47] Thus the kenosis that we find in Patristics and their followers is a portrayal of loss, the diminution of honour or a lack of immediate perception of the divine glory in Christ. Besides, they treat the self-limitation in the incarnation as associated with and not intrinsic to the divine nature as such.[48]

2.4. MODERN THEOLOGY OF KENOSIS

2.4.1. Pre-Nineteenth Century Undercurrents of Kenosis

In the midst of the foregoing, Rinse has noted that in the period of the Fathers, an exceptional voice to the unison affirmation of the unchangeability of the divine nature in relation to the human nature of the Son in the incarnation was Apollinarius with his comment that "incarnation is self-emptying".[49] He argued that the *Logos* took the place of the human soul so that his opponents interpreted him as having argued that the Son in order to put on the human nature had to undergo change.[50] And as expected at the time, his view was not only isolated but was condemned as heretical. Although Apollinarianism was vigorously dismissed in the church documents of the Fathers and councils in the subsequent periods, it was not eradicated completely because there still surfaced some voices from the undertow that advocated kenotic position especially among some sections of Lutheran theologians.

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[46] Stephen White, *Jesus and the Christ* (Dublin: Colomba Press, 2012), 64.
[47] Richard, *Christ*: *Self-Emptying*, 76-83. Lucien Richard demonstrates how the Fathers wrestled with making a reconciliation between the biblical witnesses of the life of Jesus and the philosophical/metaphysical categories in which the biblical messages were wrapped and communicated. St. Ignatius talks about the passion of Christ in the letter to the Romans on one hand, and about transcendental and unchangeable Christ on the other; and in the letter to the Ephesians he talks of the physician of flesh and yet speaks of the same as the unbegotten;
[48] Brown, *Divine Humanity*, 26.
[49] Rinse Reeling Brouwer, "Kenosis in Philippians 2:5-11 and in the History of Christian Doctrine," in *Letting Go: Rethinking Kenosis*, 90-91. Also confer Baillie, D. M., *God was in Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), 94.
[50] Rinse Reeling Brouwer, "Kenosis in Philippians 2:5-11 and in the History of Christian Doctrine," in *Letting Go: Rethinking Kenosis*, 90-91.

Although Luther himself was keen to maintain the doctrine of the two natures, he nonetheless went ahead to speak of the exchange of places and destinies as the wonderful message of the gospel. Because of the unity of the divine and human natures in Christ, the mediator, Luther contends that it is possible to have exchange of qualities, although he envisioned this exchange in one direction, from the one nature (divine) to the human nature.[51] With this appreciation that Luther lent to the human nature of Christ, it is not accidental that the modern kenotic theory has its origin among Lutheran theologians.

Modern kenotic debate has its cradle in the seventeenth century disputes among German Lutheran theologians in the German universities of Tübingen and Gießen with the former advocating that the Son possessed all the divine attributes, but their use was concealed while the former posited that the Son of God actually abandoned the use of the divine properties. Although the two positions differed on whether the Son used or concealed the divine attributes, they both applied kenosis to the incarnate *Logos*.[52]

2.4.2. Nineteenth Century's theology of Kenosis

Contrary to the aforementioned positions of the Fathers, modern theological voices have suggested that in the incarnation, the Son indeed did forfeit his divine powers of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. The divine nature of Christ came to be committed not only to mere symbolism but to actual ontological human conditions.[53] This development was a result of biblical criticism that emerged with the interest in human psychology and the development of new options in philosophy, particularly Hegelianism – which did not inform the teachings or formulation of doctrines of the early church councils.[54] In addition, it was attractive to the Enlightenment's world view because it situated Jesus within the horizon of understanding of his time so that it could properly be said that he shared in the perspective and expectation of his own milieu, and as a result one could logically conclude that biblical stories needed to be historically determined. Accordingly, biblical pericopes that were indicative of Jesus' ignorance or organic growth were highlighted.[55] In this movement, dogmas were not regarded as the foundations for religion but rather it was experience. Subsequently, "doctrines were a superstructure that rested ultimately upon the

[51] Rinse Reeling Brouwer, "Kenosis in Philippians 2:5-11 and in the History of Christian Doctrine," 92-93.
[52] David Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2013), 38.
[53] Brown, *Divine Humanity: Kenosis Explored and Defended* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 1.
[54] Ibid., 1, 14.
[55] Williams, "Kenosis and the Nature of the Persons in the Trinity," *KOERS* 69, no. 4 (2004), 625.

experiential."[56] The theological school of the time prioritised Christian experiences like conversion, regeneration over bodies of abstract doctrines as the sources of theological knowledge. Scripture was not to be read in isolation but was to correlate to experiences which were to form history of the human beings' encounter with God.

2.4.3. Proponents and Themes

As already pointed out, kenotic theology did not come to be developed until the nineteenth century with the new developments in science, biblical criticism and interest in psychology.[57] In addition, the philosophical developments with interest in experience combined with the historical investigation of the late 18th century and mid-nineteenth century, knowledge and answers to humanity's problems were not only to be sought in reason, but also in poetry, language and imagery. It was therefore important to turn to experience, literature and art as important sources of knowledge. This development had serious implications for the Christian faith in that, dogmas as sole source of religion, for example, were questionable, without human experience. It was argued with contentment that the divine was situated in human experience and realised itself through the externalisation or consciousness of the other – the human person. The consequence of this development was the historical study of the Bible with its stress on equal significance of historical contingencies to the rational content which had been preserved in the tradition. All these developments, namely in psychology, science, philosophy posed a great challenge to the account of Christian belief. It was difficult to reconcile the truth of the Christian faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ as formulated in dogmas with the details of Jesus' experience and historical contingencies as recorded in the gospels. The kenotic incarnational theory was therefore seen by some theologians as a plausible account of the Christian belief.

It is important to point out that kenotic theologians of the nineteenth century did not follow the path of anti-metaphysical opinions and neither did they dwell on the lingering creedal scepticism that characterised the time.[58] Rather, they talked of Jesus Christ apologetically as an integrated personality, stressing not only his divinity but his psychosomatic personality as well. It is noteworthy to say that at this time modern kenotic

[56] Brown, *Divine Humanity,* 37.
[57] Brown, *The Divine Trinity*, 256. From Isaac Newton onwards, motion, or change, became natural phenomenon just like rest was. And this was in complete contrast to the Aristotelian conception of attribution only to rest as a natural characteristic.
[58] Thomas Thompson, "Nineteenth-Century Kenotic Christology: The Waxing, Waning, and Weighing of a Quest for a Coherent Orthodoxy," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. Stephen Evans (Vancouver: Regent College Press, 2010), 77.

theology did not have as yet any significant influence within the Roman Catholic Church's thinking circles until early twentieth centuries with the works of Karl Rahner and Balthasar.[59]

The nineteenth century kenotic movement has its origin in mainland Europe, especially in Germany particularly with the Lutheran pastor and theologian Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875).[60] Others included Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-1984), and the Calvinist Wolfgang Friedrich Gess (1819-1891) and Frederic Louis Godet (1812-1900). Then it spread from the continental Europe and was taken up in Scotland[61] and England.[62] I should like to point it out at this juncture that since the focus of the study is not historical development of kenotic theology, I will not pursue a detailed study of many early kenotic theologians and their varied nuances of kenotically theological positions. Instead, a mention of the proponents will be done as I treat selected themes with which they are associated.

2.4.4. Compatibility and Asymmetry of Natures

Gottfried Thomasius saw the union of the two natures – divine and human – in Christ as necessary for our salvation. In this way, he argued that human salvation is grounded in the reality of the unity of divine and human characteristics of Jesus Christ. And because of this union, our human nature can be admissible or receptive to the divine nature. Equally so, the human dignity can only find its foundation in its being created by God in his image and likeness.[63] According to Thomasius then, the human nature has an inherent disposition to open up to the workings of the divine so that the deity has a permanent place in the human, and in this way thus transform humanity. Thus, Thomasius salvages the role of the human nature of Christ while at the same time upholding his divinity. However, he attaches more significance to the divine aspect over and against the human aspect. He argues that the divine

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[59] David Brown, *Divine Humanity: Kenosis Explored and Defended*, 41.

[60] Thomasius is being considered one of the most influential proponents of the 19th century kenotic theory. He was a Lutheran pastor and professor of theology at Erlangen university. Although experience is central in his Christological account, he nonetheless remains within the parameters of Scripture and Tradition, and this sets him apart from the prevailing intellectual orientation of his context and time. For example, he did not slip into Schleimacher's radicalism of regarding doctrine as superstructure to experience. As testified by David Brown, like other theologians of the time, he was convinced that "the bible should not be interpreted in isolation, but must always be viewed as part of a history of encounter between humanity and God" (*Divine Humanity: Kenosis Explored and Defended*, 44). However, this experience is not to be taken as a tendency to the humanisation of divinity or reductionism in any way since Thomasius' account of the Trinity keeps the immanent and economic trinity in a balance.

[61] Prominent of Scottish theologians include Alexander Balmain Bruce (1831-1899), Andrew Martin Fairbairn (1838-1912), Alfred Ernest Garvie (1861-1945), Peter Taylor Forsyth (1848-1921), Hugh Ross Mackintosh (1870-1936), Donald MacKinnon (1913-1994).

[62] Among the English kenotic proponents include the following: Charles Gore (1853-1932), Francis Weston (1871-1924), Oliver Quick (1885-1944), Vincent Taylor (1887-1968), William Vanstone (1923-1999)

[63] Brown, *Divine Humanity*, 46.

nature is added to the human nature and the former despite the fact that it lives within the latter and without overshadowing it, there was not a time when it did not exist.

Thomasius postulates a distinction between immanent attributes and relative attributes. The former set is characterised as essential to divinity and from which the Son could not strip of himself without ceasing to be God. Thomasius defines these attributes as love, goodness, absolute power and absolute truth. The other set of attributes, namely the relative attributes, that include omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, by which divinity is related to the world, are dropped in the incarnation.[64] According to this conception of the dynamics of changes that occur in the Son as a result of the incarnation, kenosis for Thomasius involves the shedding off of divine attributes to the mere minimal essentials. In this way, the divinity of the Son as the internal life-giving resource for the sustenance of person of Jesus Christ is assured throughout his existence. It can be concluded that, although the two natures are maintained in a single consciousness, according to Thomasius, the divine nature is portrayed as more significant than the human.

2.4.5. God As Truly and Completely Human

According to Wolfgang Friedrich Gess, in the incarnation, God completely became a human person. This he claims, is on the authority of his Christological reflection on the gospels and the New Testament testimonies about the nature and self-consciousness of Christ. Gess observes that what is manifested in the life of Christ is a fully human consciousness that is latent with divine consciousness and eventually unfolds with growing human awareness. To this end, he argues that Jesus' life started as a foetus and he gradually gained consciousness of his divine identity which was sustained by his being identified with the will of the Father and his faithfulness to the role he had to play in it.[65] And it is by virtue of being rooted in the plan of the Father that Jesus had the capacity of foreknowledge, and not as the result of a stable internal divine nature.

2.4.6. Man and then God

This position was expounded by Charles Gore. He laid the foundation of his Christology by affirming the uniqueness of Christ as unparalleled in history and could therefore be attributable only to a supernatural origin. After securely laying this foundation, he posited that Christ nonetheless first appeared as man and then through this human life divinity was

[64] Brown, *Divine Humanity*, 48.
[65] Ibid., 64-65.

manifested and acknowledged gradually.[66] Gore makes these arguments basing himself on New Testament evidences and the concern of how to read and interpret the gospel narratives of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. He believes that what we are presented with in these sources is the human person and not immediately the omnipotent or omniscient deity. Gore therefore argues for a one consciousness in Christ, a human consciousness that gradually becomes aware of its divinity. He offers no possibility of separation of the human from the divine nature, but emphasises that the Son became man and by his gradual and painful endeavour won for us our salvation. Although our salvation is won by Christ because he is God, his divinity nonetheless operates within humanity. It does not take the central stage and renders that human aspect redundant.[67]

After the brief survey of the themes under which kenosis was discussed, it can be concluded that although the modern kenoticists received inspiration from Luther's theology of exchange of places and the cross, especially in the doctrine of the *ubiquitas*, they nonetheless deviated from his accent on the soteriological significance of the cross and placed the emphasis on the incarnation. This departure is said to have at least two implications in the kenotic theory they expounded: firstly, it resulted in the *Logos* freeing himself of divinity and assuming the sins of humanity. Secondly, among liberal theologians, kenosis involves a complete rejection of the divinity of Jesus Christ.[68]

3. SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION OF KENOSIS

3.1. DILEMMAS AND DISTINCTIONS

[66] Brown, *Divine Humanity*, 136.
[67] Ibid., 140-141.
[68] Lothar Ullrich, "Creed," in *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, eds. Wolfgang Beinert and Francis Schussler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroads, 2000), 154. The consequence has been demonstrated by Thomasius' differentiation of essential and relative attributes. In addition, Gore although he refers to Christ as the cosmic principle, by situating him in history, he argues that we ought to see him as first man and then God; as special individual personality who for our sake becomes poor so that we might become rich. He rejects the idea of Christ being the saviour from the moment of conception, and in his entire life enjoying the beatific vision (Rinse Reeling Brouwer, "Kenosis in Philippians 2:5-11 and in the History of Christian Doctrine" in *Letting Go: Rethinking Kenosis*, ed. Onno Zijlstra (Bern, et al: European Academic Publishers, 2000), 100-102. The second consequence of the modern interpretation of the kenosis of Christ can be exemplified in Wolfgang Friedrich Gess' idea that on becoming man, the divinity of the Son remained behind in what he calls *depositum*, and consequently he cannot therefore be a true God. Further, he illustrates that Jesus had normal human growth and development although, not the same as any human beings for he was exceptionally endowed with ideals of intelligence, wisdom and other human qualities so that he would be an apex example to the rest of humanity. (Ibid., 96-99)

Kenotic theology finds its place in the theological discourse because it is inherent to the doctrine of the Incarnation. The general connection between kenosis and incarnation is that God in Jesus became man. However kenotic theology goes further to posit that the Son on becoming human stripped himself of some of his divine powers.

In the modern discourse, theology of kenosis is treated under two shadows: quasi or moderate kenosis and strict or extreme kenosis. The former postulates that Jesus had normal divine powers but chose not to use them, although it is argued that he however had "the power to acquire the power" to access them and do things that he could not do as human person, for example, the turning of water into wine at Cana.[69] Meanwhile in the strict kenotic model, the Son at the incarnation gave up normal divine powers and relied on the Father who sustained him in being.[70] Robin Lee Poidevin hints on this point when he suggests that by a necessary being is meant the capacity to maintain oneself in existence, and since to be human is to be subjected to the fate of mortality, Jesus had to rely on his Father for his existence.[71] But the problems still with this kenotic theory is that it allows for the possibility of non-existence of the Son because in the incarnation he will have given up the self-sufficiency property.[72]

In either case, kenoticism in whatever form poses a quandary in that the omni-properties are not only divine characteristic, but are essential divine attributes and therefore divine persons cannot lose them. So, if the Son remained divine at the Incarnation, he could not but retained the omni-properties otherwise he ceased being divine. Further, divine beings are unchangeable.[73] A necessary being cannot become contingent.[74]

In an attempt to find a way through this impasse, some distinction has been made between an attribute being necessary *de dictio* (necessary tied to the nature, the kind, the divinity) and necessary *de re* (necessary to the individuality of the person regardless of whether he ceases being divine or not). The argument drawn from this illustration is that if by 'necessary' is meant *de dictio*, kenosis would be possible because the Word would lose the

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[69] Peter Forrest, "the Incarnation: A Philosophical case for Kenosis," *Religious Studies* 36, no. 2 (2000): 127-140, 127-128;
[70] Ibid., 128-129; There is a qualification that the Omni-properties maybe manifestations of essential divine attributes, but they are not necessarily normal divine powers.
[71] Robin Le Poidevin, "Kenosis, Necessity and Incarnation," *Heythrop Journal* (2013), 222.
[72] Ibid., 223.
[73] Ibid., 130.
[74] Ibid., 219.

properties, and if *de re*, the Word would not lose them unless he ceases to be in being. And that means kenosis would not be possible.[75]

Another attempt to find a way out of this impasse has been a distinction made by Thomas Morris between "essential properties of being merely human" and "essential properties of being truly human" when talking of the humanity of the Son on the one hand, and the distinction between "essential properties of being divine *simpliciter"* and "essential properties of being truly divine" when talking about those properties that pertain to the divinity of the Son of God.[76] In making this distinction, Thomas Morris hopes to make a successful argument that it is possible to have essential divine and human properties compossible in Jesus Christ because essentially being merely human is not the same as essentially being truly human, and neither does essentially being divine simpliciter the same thing as essentially being truly divine.

Another kenotic solution around the impasse, it has been argued, is to replace the necessary essential property with "necessary-unless-freely-choosing-to-be-otherwise" to accommodate the Son having or not having the omni-powers at specific times. But it still does not make sense that a being can be contingently necessary, for "a necessary being is necessarily so".[77] This suggests that the kenotic idea cannot be applied to the necessary existence of God, for to grant the possibility of contingency in the divine beings would allow a possibility for the non-existence of the Son. Moreover, if we adhere to the absolute necessity of God, that his existence does not in any way depend on other conditions, then we cannot conceive of God who ceases to exist at any point whatsoever. Robin Le Poidvin, although he does not deviate from the account that the divine persons' will to exist must be effective, he nonetheless argues that the Son's will may be said to be only contingently so, to the effect that it is not his individual will that explains his existence but of the other persons of the Trinity.[78]

In the efforts to find a bypass over the obstacles to kenotic theology, Peter Forrest has proposed a robust solution by having a different conception of the divine other not in terms of necessary or absolute powers. He thinks that "we should progress beyond the 'omni-God' conception to that of the kenotic God who out of love abandons absolute power, while

[75] Thomas Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 98-100.
[76] Morris, "Divinity, Humanity and Death," *Religious Studies* 19 (1983), 457.
[77] Robin Le Poidevin, "Kenosis, Necessity and Incarnation," 219.
[78] Ibid.

retaining sufficient power to warrant total trust".[79] This conception would then in a way also incorporate the "unless freely choosing to be otherwise" qualifications. Further, Forrest argues that it is never incompatible to have the power and the freedom not to exercise it. In this respect, even if it is granted that the Son retained the omni-powers, he also retained the freedom to use or not to use them.[80] It is important to stress that in the freedom not to, the Son is not placed under coercion but he is motivated by "love and goodness" which ultimately impresses on himself restraint or self-limitation.[81] Moreover, Forrest sees that this tendency of God's self-limitation in his own freedom can be traced already at creation when he granted free will to the human person.[82]

It suffices to admit that despite these apparently convincing arguments for the kenotic theory, there are questions that remain to be answered. For example, the question of psychological continuity between the finite Jesus and the infinite Son of God, the permanent kenosis, that is, kenosis after exaltation, and other related unresolved issues which are not going to be discussed here because they do not directly impinge on the purpose of this study. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that these unresolved questions admittedly indicate that kenosis is a complex but rich Christian theory.

3.2. CONSIDERING THE TWO-NATURE DYNAMICS

3.2.1. STATING THE PROBLEM

There is no doubt that when we talk of the nature of a thing, we are referring to that which defines it, its essence. Bearing in mind this consideration, if Jesus Christ had both divine and human nature, the two together necessarily defined who he was. This position has not been bitterly contested. However, as to how the two relate to each other has been a subject of heated theological and philosophical debates raising controversies in the early church leading to the convening of several ecumenical councils. I will not go into the details of the controversies, but I will here concern myself with the two broad strands of the interrelationship of the two natures.

Firstly, one view has been that the pre-existent *Logos*, the *Logos asarkos*, the abstract nature of the Son adopted the concrete human nature in the incarnation and neither of the two

[79] Forrest, "The Incarnation: A Philosophical Case for Kenosis," 131.
[80] Ibid., 133.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., 136.

was absorbed or submerged into each other. What happened was a more intimate relationship of the divine to the human, but maintaining the two wills, and two intellects divine and human, but with the human aspect being an acquired property appended to the divine nature. In the last analysis, far from maintaining a delicate balance, the human falls to the secondary grade as an acquired property to the divine with the consequence that the Son did not become human but he only appended the human nature to himself.[83] This smacks of Nestorianism as far as it propagates the distinctiveness of two intellects and two wills divine and human. Or rather it could be regarded as close to monophysitism with the divine nature submerging into the human nature. In this conception there is an absolute rule of the divine nature over the human nature which is denied a distinctive human personality in what is known '*anhypostasia*', some sort of impersonal human nature. Furthermore, even the developed position of '*enhypostasia*' that attributed a distinctive personality to the human nature still viewed the human nature as being animated by the divine nature.[84] This view is for example illustrated by Gregory of Nyssa in his famous suggestion that the human mind was swallowed up in the divine nature like vinegar in the ocean.[85] This view was taken by Apollinarius to an extent that he denied the existence of the human soul in Christ.

Secondly, a rather opposite take on the above view is where the pre-existent abstract nature is endowed with the material human body. According to Brian Leftow, such endowment should not only be limited to the physical bodily nature but must also include the abstract aspects of the human nature such as soul, intellect and will. Moreover, he contends that it is not possible to speak of these properties being disentangled from the person who actually possesses them.[86] Therefore, if Christ became human person, it demanded that he had to have human body, mind, soul and will. And to speak meaningful of Christ as a person, his inclusive concrete human nature is indispensable to his being to the extent that it so to speak houses the divine nature and in a way that makes the divine abstract nature absorbed or submerged in it. This granted, the Son of God did cross over the metaphysical line from the divine to the human and not merely an accumulation of the human to the divine. In other

[83] Alvin Plantinga, "On Theory, Mind and Truth," *Faith and Philosophy* 16, no. 2 (1999), 183-187.
[84] Brown, *Divine Trinity*, 227.
[85] Ibid., 229.
[86] Brian Loftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," in *The Incarnation*, eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 277-279.

words, he did not only put on the human nature but he actually divested himself of divinity and became human, a position that is defended by strict kenoticisits.[87]

3.2.2. Divine Nature as Related to Personhood

As already noted, the question of the two natures of Christ is at the heart of Christological debates and controversies throughout the history of the church. However, what does not appear to be given abundant attention is how the two natures cohere in the one-person Jesus Christ, as a supposit, and existing subject with set of properties. It is worth repeating that the definition of Chalcedon in any way attempted to answer this question.[88] After Chalcedon, the debate continued, and Edwin Chr. Van Driel takes account of this debate in a broad two-pathways as represented by Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus in the medieval period.[89] According to Aquinas, the relationship of the person to nature can be conceived of analogously to the relationship between the whole and its parts: with the person being the *esse*, the composite whole in which the qualities share. In the person of Jesus Christ therefore, the pre-existent *Logos*, the Word's original *esse* becomes the substrate that supports the human nature.[90] This distinction serves a strategic purpose because it is consistent with classical Christology in which the divine nature is meant to give life to the human characteristics of the Son. Moreover, the divine element is suitably placed that it is intricately tied to the person of the Son while the human nature on its part is appended to and has to be dependent and sustained by the pre-existent logos.

The second way represented by Scotus looks at the relationship of the person with nature in terms of the relationship of a substance to its accident. Scotus' preference for this choice is because accidents can stand on their own when apart from the substance.[91] In this way, he leaves possibility for the independence of nature – especially the human nature - without being absorbed into another. In pursuance of this motive, Scotus further considers

[87] Brown gives the following reasons for his defence of kenotic models: "first, the model is like the Two Nature Christology (TNC) at least in this respect, that it instantiates what is incontestably an incarnational identity claim, that the human Jesus was the same person as the divine Christ or Word; secondly, the model is not obviously incoherent, finally, it is a plausible interpretation of the historical evidence. *The Divine Trinity*, 231.
[88] The Chalcedon definition drew the boundaries within which to do Christological debates as orthodox, but it did not in any way give us a Christological theory.
[89] Edwin Chr. Van Driel, "The Logic of Assumption," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, 271-275.
[90] Ibid. Also cf. STH, 3a q.17, a.2.
[91] John Duns Scotus, *The Quodlibetal Questions*, trans. Felix Alluntis and Allan Wolter (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1975), 432-433.

this relationship in terms of the relationship between a subject and an accident.[92] His suggestion is an approach whereby an individual person's nature consists of a common nature and an individuating nature.[93] And in the case of Jesus Christ, his common human nature was individuated by the *Logos*. In other words, the human nature of Christ had to depend on an extrinsic personifier to be a person.[94] Arguing in this way, Scotus attempts to give due seriousness to the mutual dependence of the divine and human aspects of Jesus Christ. However, one could also argue that it is a matter of the starting point from which one begins. For if conversely one had his starting point as the divine nature being the common nature, and the human nature being individuating personifier, one would have a different, or in fact an opposite results or conclusions. Despite the weakness of this argument, it nonetheless avoids the danger of making a dichotomy between the human and divine aspects of Jesus Christ or postulating a divided consciousness in Jesus Christ.

The belief that Jesus Christ was both divine and human impinges on our grasp of his perfection. In other words, to what extent can we maintain that Jesus Christ was a perfect being? Classical theory has always maintained that all divine properties and assistance were communicated to the Son so that he received maximal graces and beatific vision during his earthly life. Again, van Driel finds Aquinas a faithful defender of divine perfection with his assertion that, "It would not be right for the Son of God to assume an imperfect human nature. He had to be perfect, because through him the whole race was to be brought back to perfection."[95] Jesus Christ therefore possessed a beatific vision, full intellectual knowledge and knew all that possibly could be known either by direct revelation or through the workings of his intellect. Taking this as Aquinas' position, it is not surprising that it rhythms well with his causal principle and soteriological arguments that God, because of infinite perfection is the source and cause of life and salvation. And therefore, the closer created beings are to the source, the more they become perfect.[96]

It is undeniable that the classical position does not give room to the growth in grace and consciousness in Jesus Christ. However, it remains a challenge to reconcile such an evident lacuna that exists between a perfect Jesus Christ and the biblical pictures of the same

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[92] Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 13.
[93] Ibid., 14. Scotus posits the human nature of Jesus as the denominator in which the *Logos* shares.
[94] Scotus, *The Quodlibetal Questions*, 434-5.
[95] Driel, "The Logic of Assumption," 171-175; also Cf. STH, 3a, q.9, a.1.
[96] Ibid., 171-175.

person who expresses lack of knowledge, understanding of times and events as illustrated in biblical narratives. It is here that kenotic theologians think they can bridge this gap by giving a Christological theory that is consistent with the biblical witness of the person of Jesus Christ. They postulate a development and growth in knowledge and grace of the incarnated Son of God. To arrive at this point, they trace the steps of Scotus' suggestion that Jesus Christ's human nature was personified by the pre-existent Word.

3.2.3. THE CHALCEDONIAN SOLUTION

The ecumenical council of Chalcedon (451) has been referred to as the defining moment that ended the controversies surrounding the relationship of the divine and human natures of Christ. The council declared that Jesus Christ is,

> Truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; … one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only be-gotten, recognised in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures is being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence.[97]

The council provided the boundaries within which to speak meaningfully and legitimately about the human and divine aspects of the Son of God. However, it has been described as a hopeless compromise because it did not stipulate anything new but sustained the conflicting Alexandrian – emphasis on divinity of Christ - and Antiochean – emphasis on humanity of Christ - in balance. In addition, it did not bring to an end the Christological debates as evidenced in the persistent minority Monophysite and Nestorian churches. Evidently, inconsistencies and contradictions abound in Chalcedon formulations because the Council Fathers could not demonstrate logically and meaningfully how one person could possess simultaneously both the divine and human properties. For example, being necessary is incompatible with being contingent, just as being omnipotent, omniscient are incongruent with being non-omnipotent and non-omniscient. Different options have been explored to find

[97] Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd edit. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 73.

a way around this difficulty, and popularly is the distinction between essential and non-essential properties of God or human beings respectively. Or again the suggestion of Thomas Morris who differentiates between properties of being human and properties of being merely human on the one hand and properties of being divine or properties of being divine simpliciter on the other hand,[98] or his postulation that what is essential to God is not omniscience of omnipotence, but rather the property of being omnipotent or omniscient-unless-freely-and-temporality-choosing-to-be-otherwise.[99] These attempts are however all unacceptable to the Christian confession of Jesus Christ as truly God and truly man, as Davis observes, "… he was truly human but not merely human, truly divine but not divine simpliciter."[100] The belief of Christians is that in Jesus Christ the characters of the human nature and the divine nature are preserved and found in the one person and one hypostasis simultaneously.

To be precise, what is not explained explicitly is how the attributes of the two natures come to be characteristic of the one person. Nonetheless, although it is not clear from the Chalcedon definition itself, it can be deduced from the various positions of the Chalcedon architects such as Athanasius of Alexandria and Cyril of Alexandria that the attributes of divine and human natures were communicated or predicated to the one person of Jesus Christ in an invariable manner. His divine characteristic are attributes proper to the pre-existent *Logos* while His human characteristics were added on to him, both of which nonetheless are attributable to his personhood since the human flesh has become also his nature. In this manner, it could be possible to talk of both impassible and passible God, with the Son suffering in the flesh and not in the Godhead.[101] According to this conception, what is divine is strong, holy, righteous and what is human is weak, sinful, indecent; and for Jesus Christ to be God and suitable for his mediatory role, the divine aspect of his personhood had to animate if not to absorb the promptings of his human nature.

With the kenotic Christological understanding however, there was a time in history when the Son of God out of his own freedom and in obedience to his Father's will emptied

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[98] Morris, "Divinity, Humanity, and Death," *Religious Studies*, 19 (1983), 457.
[99] Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 75.
[100] Stephen T. Davies, "Is Kenosis Orthodox?" in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, 116-117.
[101] Ronald J. Feenstra, "A Kenotic Christological Method for Understanding the Divine Attributes," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*; also cf. Athanasius, "Four Discourses Against the Arians," III, 32-34; Cyril of Alexandria, "Cyril of Alexandria's Second Letter to Nestorius," in *The Christological Controversy*, trans. and ed. Richard A. Norris (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 133-134. Aquinas clarifies this point further: although the attributes of the divine and human natures of Christ are affected in the one hypostasis or suppositum, they maintain the nature proper to them (STH, IIIa. 46.12).

himself of divine prerogatives and became a human being. This is an event that involves a radical break in metaphysical positions as the divine and the human are not on the same wave-length; the divine attributes are not juxtaposed against the human characteristics. There is a real crossing over and an overlap on the basis that what is human is not completely foreign to what is divine. In this regards, the Son of God upon the incarnation could be omnipotence in some sense even when he temporarily had to become non-omniscient.[102] This agrees with Thomas Morris position that it is not omniscience that is the characteristic of the divine, but the attribute of omniscient-unless-freely-and-temporarily-choosing-to-be-otherwise.[103] To the exclusion of the notion of omniscience simpliciter, Ronald Feenstra finds Thomas Morris's position logical and relevant for the kenotically Christological understanding of the two natures co-existent in the Second person of the Trinity for the purpose of atonement or reconciliation of the humanity and the world to God. In this manner, Feenstra thinks that since it is through these humble and humiliated actions that the Son wrought the salvation of the sinful world, it can be argued that the incarnation cannot be conceived of in any other ways other than kenotically.[104] He draws inspiration from Barth who asserted that, through Christ, God humbled himself and gained our salvation without contradicting his nature.[105] Thus, the divine elements are at work in and through the human nature without any contradiction in themselves. And if there is any contradiction, it is in our understanding of the nature of God and not in the nature of God in itself. What is being attested to is that in the incarnation, not to the exclusion of the humiliation and the suffering, we come to understand with such abundant clarity who God is. Referring to the classical text of the self-emptying of Christ, N.T Wright admit the difficulty with this concept of God but which he exhorts us to appreciate as a novelty compared to the age-old image of God as absolute self-glorified being.[106]

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[102] Davies, *Logic and the Nature of God* (London: Macmillan and Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 124-126.
[103] Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, 99-101.
[104] Feenstra, "A Kenotic Christological Method for Understanding the Divine Attributes," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, 153.
[105] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV*, eds. G.W.Bromiley and T.F. Torrence (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 199.
[106] Nicholas T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 84.

4. THE NEXUS BETWEEN CHRISTOLOGY AND TRINITY

'Personhood' grounds the relation of kenotic Christology to the Trinity because the concept is at the intersection of the two disciplines. The kenosis of the Son, one of the persons of the Trinity, affects the rest of the persons. This has been aptly captured by Thomas Thompson and Cornelius Plantinga:

> Whereas the Trinitarian formula prescribes a plurality of persons in a unity of nature, the Christological formula prescribes a unity of person in a plurality of natures. What concerns us most particularly is the notion of person, which formally ought to be univocal between Trinity and Incarnation, since it is identical in respect to one person of the Trinity, the Incarnate One.[107]

The kenotic theologians would be inclined to dwell more on the question of the personhood of the Son and less on his natures. In distinguishing out the personhood of the Son from the Father and the Holy Spirit, kenotic theologians tend to appeal to a differentiated, or social, model of the Trinity as opposed to the image of the Trinity as a unitary supreme substance or absolute subject. The latter portrays the Trinity as singularity of divine personhood, while the former suggests a community of divine persons who relate to themselves and to the created world. Focusing on the personhood of the Trinity has its fruitfulness in that God is viewed far from being indivisible, immutable or impassible to forging a picture of a dynamic God who relates to divine persons and to history. Further, once our understanding of the Trinity is this way, it becomes imperative to us to pattern the image of human person on that of the divine person and thus confront the modern conception of the human person as an autonomous individual.[108]

Kenotic theologians find the social models of the Trinity apt because it gives an answer to the main critique put on the table of kenotic theory, namely, that question of what happens to the celestial world orders during the incarnation, or precisely who keeps watch on

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[107] Thomas Thompson and Cornelius Plantinga, "Trinity and Kenosis," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, 168. Although both the concepts of the person and nature dominate the Trinitarian and Christological discourses, admittedly, the consistency made in the reference to nature wanes as compared to that of person. Moreover, the divine nature is said to be person-forming principle and life-giving force to the human, consequently positioning the human nature dependent on the eternal *Logos*. Ibid., 169.

[108] Thompson and Plantinga, "Trinity and Kenosis," 173.

the celestial world and the physical world while the divinity in the incarnation is powerless? The accentuation in the differentiated model is that there is a dynamic relationality and fellowship at the heart of the intra-divine life and in the outward care and dealings with the world. It becomes possible then to speak of the Trinity in terms of social analogies such as family, community and society of persons. Because of the inter-subjectivity that flourishes in the social models of the incarnation, it is possible to speak of a Spirit-Christology by which "Jesus the Messiah, the Anointed One was a man specially endowed with God's Spirit, who by all gospel appearances lived dependently upon his Father and amazingly among his neighbours in Pneumatic power and energies".[109] This image of the Trinity as personalist with characteristic relationality, affection, sympathy, involvement in historical contingencies draws our attention to what is at work as the driving force of both the intra-Trinity life and external relations, namely love. Love is the life-giving force of the intra-Trinitarian life and animates divine engagement with the world. And it is precisely because of this one denominator of love in the life and activity of the Trinity that Karl Rahner made the famous Trinitarian axiom "economic Trinity is immanent Trinity and vice versa".[110]

The person, the hypostasis refers to a particular substance that has a common and universal nature. Prioritising personhood as the firm ground upon which to build a kenotic theory, kenoticist theologians nonetheless mean to attest, on the other hand, that although individuality is central to the definition of the Trinity, it should not overshadow the possibility of the inclusiveness of other important constitutive elements.[111] While their emphasis is on starting point is the differentiated persons of the Trinity, personhood is not extracted and treated in isolation from the *ousia*, the nature to which these persons belong.

The differentiated personhood model is fruitful in that it allows for the self-consciousness of personhood as a necessary constituent of the person. Once the conception that God is a simple unitary entity is overcome, a way is paved for understanding God as a dynamic community of persons capable of communication, responsiveness and liveliness. Seen from this vantage point, each person of the Trinity is taken to possess a distinct consciousness,

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[109] Thompson, "Nineteenth-Century Kenotic Christology: The Waxing, Waning, and Weighing of a Quest for a Coherent Orthodoxy" in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, p. 106.
[110] Dennis Jowers has aptly unpacked this axiom as follows, "The immanent constitution of the Trinity forms a kind of a priori law for the divine self-communication ad extra so that the structure of the latter cannot but correspond to the structure of the former". Dennis Jowers, "A Test of Karl Rahner's Axiom, "The Economic Trinity is the Immanent Trinity and vice versa,"" *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 70, no. 3 (2006), 421. Also cf. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herders, 1970), 36.
[111] Thompson and Plantinga, "Trinity and Kenosis," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, 178.

understanding, and will. Stephen Davis emphatically puts it that by incarnation is meant God became man, and so

> The incarnation means first that Jesus Christ is a person, a real human person. Jesus Christ is not an idea, an ideal, an emanation from God, a divine influence, a principle, a lifestyle, or an ethical system. These notions are ruled out because what God became was a man ("and the word became flesh and dwelt among us").[112]

However, Thompson and Plantinga warn that care must be taken that this notion of God is not a "subjectivity in the fashion of the Idealistic tradition, which maintains that personal identity is constituted by self-consciousness secured in a reflexive intra-subjectivity by bracketing all others out, a modern anthropology prone to a possessive individualism and culture of narcissism. Rather, it is a self-consciousness dependent upon inter-subjectivity, which anticipates our third dimension, the relational."[113]

The social Trinitarian paradigm coheres with the *perichoresis* or perichoretic Trinitarian unity of the divine persons that was developed by John of Damascus' De Fide Orthodoxa of the 8th century.[114] However the differentiated model has a nuanced view on the Trinity from that of *perichoresis*. For whereas *perichoresis* is based on ontological (*ousia*) reference to the divine persons as their shared ground, the differentiated persons have a unity based on a shared purpose, communion and love. The social, or differentiated, theories move away from looking at God primarily in terms of *ousia* but rather in terms of *hypostasis* – three differentiated and distinct persons but who are in communion and therefore in relationship of solidarity, inter-dependence and love. It is this notion of the Trinity that is faithful to the biblical revelation of who God is: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[115]

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[112] Evans, "Jesus Christ: Saviour or Guru?," in *Encountering Jesus: a Debate on Christology*, 47.
[113] Thompson and Plantinga, "Trinity and Kenosis," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, 179.
[114] Drawing on "in-ness" of John's passages, particularly Jn 10.30, John of Damascus postulated *perichoresis* – the indwelling and inter-penetration or inter-subjectivity as inherent characteristic of each of the persons of the Trinity.
[115] Thompson and Plantinga, "Trinity and Kenosis," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, 187-188. The biblical witness of God is that is he is a community of persons. For even the famous Shema of Deuteronomy 6.4 to which various appeal is often made in putting defence against any concept of God outside the box of singularity and simplicity, is an incorrect or misconstrued defence because the datum has nothing to make in reference to the inner or intra-Trinitarian life but is a dogmatic statement of who God is in relation to the created world.

In differentiated Trinity, the distinct personality of the Son can therefore be established. The individual characters of Jesus Christ as a person can thus be delineated as they abundantly manifest themselves to us, and outstandingly is his kenotic character that is pervasive in his teaching and activities. And Jesus Christ being the perfect image of God the Father, kenotic theism "sees the activity of self-emptying as a key to understanding the divine nature."[116] Stephen Evans would think that 'taking seriously such a view of the incarnation might push us towards a revised understanding of God,"[117] from a changeless, timeless God to a dynamic and involved God. The incarnation "seems to shout to us that God is intimately involved in the temporal world and capable of change that is radical and even shocking character".[118]

5. OMNIPOTENCE AND SELF-LIMITATION: AN ODD CO-INHERENCE?

The question of God limiting his powers falls within the scope of broader paradoxical question of omnipotence vis-a-vis creaturely freedom. The question could be precisely formulated as: can the omnipotent God who brings into being and lets go (in freedom) still be omnipotent? The answer to this paradoxical question cannot be simply a 'yes' or a 'no'. In either case one would be trapped to consider that God is not omnipotent. In regards to God letting be of creatures, the answer to the question cannot be a 'yes' because this would mean God has no control over what he has created and therefore is not an omnipotent God. On the other hand, still applied to creatures, if God creates and yet cannot have sway over what he has created, then he is impotent as far as they are concerned.

Despite the above paradox, some narrow window of escape has been found in the argument that, although it would appear to contradict the nature of God by creating and simultaneously determining the behaviours and actions of creatures, God nonetheless could create (and lets go), but retains the right to hold back the liberty at any time.[119] Despite this argument appearing contradictory and illogical, it nonetheless resonates with the traditional conception of God as not only the creator, but also the one who continuously sustains in existence what he has created.

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[116] Evans, "Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, 190.
[117] Ibid., 194; The affirmation that God is love, for example, can only be acceptable to the human person on authority of the life, deeds and death of Jesus Christ for the sinful world. Ibid., 202.
[118] Ibid., 194.
[119] Ibid., 206-207.

A further possibility is that God can allow his creatures to have real independence away from his control. Drawing on Kierkegaard, Stephen Evans posit that "if God limits himself, this is not a loss of omnipotence, but an exercise of it".[120] For God must be omnipotent first in order to be self-limiting. He must be omnipotent all the time for otherwise no being would be dependent on him. In other words, God's omnipotence grounds and gives rise to creaturely liberty. And because of this freedom on God's part, and that arises out of his omnipotence, it can be said that,

> "If God wills to follow a certain policy, including a policy of 'stepping back' and allowing other beings some freedom of action, he is fully capable of consistently holding to that policy. In such a case, God's self-limitation would not be a sign of loss of divine power, but an expression of God's lack of fickleness, an embodiment of his covenantal faithfulness".[121]

God's self-limitation is not therefore diminution of his powers because the one who limits himself is all powerful as well as completely faithful.

As already pointed out, the question of divine self-limitation in the incarnation can be treated within the context of the general problem inherent in talking of God's omnipotence and creaturely freedom. However, the question of divine self-limitation in the incarnation is not on the same wavelength of the question of omnipotence vis-a-vis creaturely liberty. In the incarnation, the self-limitation of God is in a radical way. The situation created by the Son is a hard reality of not only limiting his powers but a divestiture of the divine prerogatives to the inclusion of omnipotence.[122]

6. SUFFERING AND DEATH: THE APOGEE OF THE SON'S DESCENSUS

Unlike the foregoing discussions on kenosis that tend to focus on the incarnation for the most part in isolation from the soteriological significance, kenotic theologians, mainly from the traditional Christian confessions, place the articulation of theology of kenosis on the salvific acts of Jesus Christ: passion and death, as epitomic for kenotic Christology. For they argue that it is in the passion and death of the Son of God that he is utterly stripped of everything of

[120] Evans, "Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God," 208.
[121] Ibid., 210.
[122] Ibid., 213-214.

dignity, glory and power. Furthermore, it is in these events that the other persons of the Trinity come to bear on the life of the incarnate Son. In other words, it is in these acts that his self-abasement radically takes the central stage and yet at the same time, it is in them that his divinity comes to be so manifest more than ever. In these events is an opening through which we have a gaze into the relationship of the Son to the Trinitarian persons. Precisely, the abandoning of the Son to die on the cross can best be understood only in terms of "his modus of being related to the Father, which, moreover requires his divinity to be conceived as mediated by his humanity".[123] Seen from this perspective, the cross then becomes a climax of a development of awareness of the divinity of Christ from his organic growth and development as a human person. Novello poignantly puts it in this way:

> The signs and wonders that Jesus had performed earlier by virtue of being empowered by the spirit are no longer apparent in his passion; he is now scorned and mocked, rejected and condemned, and abandoned by God. Yet in this saving event of the forsaken son and the forsaking father, it is the spirit of God who communicates and preserves the ineffable love between the son and the father, which is the exegesis of the event.[124]

The cross radicalises the kenotic life of Jesus Christ in that even the Spirit's presence notwithstanding the consolation received, renounces to supply for the mighty works he accomplished and for which he was hailed during his earthly ministry. It is only in this kind of self-emptying can we speak meaningfully of Jesus' identification with the dire limitation and brokenness of human condition. God is experienced as a passible God, and since suffering is taken up into God, its presence is not the absence of God, but is a mode of his presence.[125] This way, it is possible to think of supra temporal suffering in the Trinity whereby by the Father's begetting and sending of the Son, he experiences kenosis of self by allowing his divinity to be manifest in the humanity of the Son. While in the case of the Son, he by becoming human experiences supra temporal kenosis. On the part of the Holy Spirit, he divests himself of the hypostatic union and takes up the role of being a bridge between the

[123] Henry L. Novello, "Jesus' Cry of Lament: Towards a True Apophaticism," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (2012), 38-60, 48.
[124] Ibid., 53.
[125] Paul Fiddes, *Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 191-192.

Father and the Son.[126] Because self-limitation is inherent in the life of the Trinity, the abandonment or suffering of the Son is something that is willed by God. And because of the unbreakable unity that exists between the persons of the Trinity, the Father and the Holy Spirit suffer with the Son, not however physically but spiritually and nevertheless, not in any less intensity.[127]

7. THE PUZZLE OF ABANDONMENT AND LOVE

Situating the descent of the Son within the context of God's plan for the redemption of the world, the passion and death of Jesus Christ are not acts only on the part of the Son, but are also of the entire Trinity. To attain the eternal plan of salvation, the Father surrendered him to the cruel world in order that the world might be saved.[128] Everything that takes place in the life of Jesus Christ, and centrally his passion and death, is a fulfilment of the desire of God that all maybe saved from damnation. In this way we can speak of him as having being made into sin, bore our sins, and was subjected to God's judgement.[129] Nonetheless, in this abandonment is a strong relationship of ineffable love between the Father and the Son through the Spirit so that even the cry of lament on the cross is not out of absence or rejection, but is a silent presence.[130] In this apparent hiddenness is an intensification of God's presence.[131] All this is possible because of love, an eternal love that pre-existed and animated the intra-Trinitarian life and is in its nature and defines divinity itself.[132] Seen from this vantage point, that the self-limitation or descent is an event that flows out of the Trinitarian love, there is a reason to consider that all the events associated with Jesus Christ are willed by the Trinitarian God. What Jesus Christ does in history is essentially what God is in himself, since what God does is his will and his will is always in accord with his nature.[133] In this way, the incarnation, passion and death of Jesus Christ is not reduced to his humanity. Indeed, such reduction constitutes an inadequate and impoverished image of Jesus Christ as

[126] Paul L. Gavrilyuk, "The Kenotic Theology of Sergius Bulgakov," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 3 (2015), 256.
[127] Gavrilyuk, "The Kenotic Theology of Sergius Bulgakov," 264.
[128] Novello, "Jesus' Cry of Lament," 50.
[129] Gerard O'Collins, *Jesus our Redeemer: A Christian Approach to Salvation* (New York: Oxford University, 2007), 159.
[130] Novello, "Jesus' Cry of Lament," 50.
[131] Ibid., 55.
[132] Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 299.
[133] Novello, "Jesus' Cry of Lament," 54.

both God and man who suffered on the cross. And the fact that Jesus' life and mission do not end in death is an indisputable claim to his divinity. His resurrection is indicative of the fact that "he is the servant of God who inaugurates the reign of God."[134] In the incarnation, the Son of God remained divine, he did not lose his divine nature; but he abdicated his divine life of glory; a self-limitation of the fullness of blessedness, joy and delight. The renunciation of the divine prerogatives is demonstrated by his reliance on the Father expressed in his prayers addressed to the Father, and his acknowledgement of lack of foreknowledge of what was to come in the future. In a similar way, the Son subjects himself to the Holy Spirit temporarily, thus he becomes like one of the prophets, led and guided by the Holy Spirit.[135]

The Son's submission to the will of the Father is not out of subservience but it is a filial obedience and receptivity of the love with which the Father in turn has loved the Son so much so that "his descent manifests … the infinite expanse of their mutual love".[136]

At the centre of the redemptive work of Christ is God's love, and which is revealed as self-sacrificial. If this is the case, then what is inherent to God's nature and inner relationship between the Trinitarian life must also be sacrificial. It involves the emptying of one into another and thereby finding fulfilment in the other, not because of inescapable external compulsion but solely because it belongs to the proper nature of God.[137]

CONCLUSION

The second chapter sets the stage and prepares the ground for discussing Balthasar's theology in the subsequent chapters. It gives and clarifies the general understanding of kenosis. From the historical analysis I have made, it can be ascertained that although kenosis was at the heart of the doctrinal controversies of the early church, it was not given the due attention it deserved. This is in part because it was such a delicate notch to stretch in the context of fierce theological controversies of the early church where God was defined in rigid philosophical categories. The kenotic motif was supressed because, in part, of the fear that stressing it would lead to certain theological positions, such as Arianism, which were considered heretical. In their theologies, the Fathers endeavoured to assert the divinity of Christ against all reductionist tendencies. They were careful not to give an understanding of Jesus that

[134] Richard, *Christ: The Self-Emptying God*, 44.
[135] Gavrilyuk, "Kenotic Theology of Sergius Bulgakov," 260.
[136] Anne Hunt, "Paschal-Eucharistic Soundings: Intimations and Challenges," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 76, no 4 (2011), 358.
[137] Gavrilyuk, "Kenotic Theology of Sergius Balgakov," 256.

would compromise his soteriological significance, for they believed he had to be God in order to effect the salvation of the world. However, in an attempt to maintain the divinity of Christ, the teaching of the fathers placed God far and above the messy and chaotic created order. They attributed the weaknesses Jesus exhibited as pertaining to his human nature. They were simply in radical contradiction to his divine nature. It can thus be deduced that this understanding of Christ would not provide an accommodating ground for liberation theology's tenets to thrive. The contradictions and dilemma which abound in their theology points to the inadequate courage the Fathers and those who followed in their tradition to pursue Christological questions beyond the set boundaries of formulations of ecumenical councils.

However, with new theological methodology and development in sciences, the theologians of 19th century started to give serious attention to the humanity of Christ and thus kenosis gained prominence as a theological subject. This was, however, nursed by already ongoing shift of emphasis in Trinitarian definition from nature to personhood, or from *perichoresis* to a differentiated model. These changes permitted modern theologians to express their understanding of God in relational symbols and categories. Thus, when Balthasar enters the kenotic debate, he picks up from this modern rather than the patristic understanding of Christ, although he draws substantial insights from the patristics and traditional theology. Unlike other modern theologians, Balthasar's aim in his kenotic theology, like the Fathers, is the soteriological significance of Christ for the modern person. From the subsequent chapters, it has been demonstrated that the motive for Balthasar's kenotic theology is not the same as that of the theologians I have discussed in this chapter. Whereas the discussions seen in this chapter ensued as an attempt to give justification for Christ's divinity/humanity in an age of new discovery and interest in the human person, Balthasar's aim is to present Christ as the redeemer of the world in an age where the human person turns to himself and the human history for his own salvation. Furthermore, whereas what has been treated here is an apologetic statement of kenosis to give account for Christian belief in Christ, Balthasar's kenotic theology is soteriological and has a strong ethical imperative for believers in Christ. In reference to the relationship of Jesus' human self-consciousness to divine self-consciousness, Balthasar sees it futile to appeal to human science to establish when precisely Jesus became aware of this significance. Balthasar moves from 'ontological' to 'obediently relational terms so as to redeem the eventfulness of the incarnation from timelessness and non-actuality with Jesus' mission of reconciling the world

to God as the animating force and driving force of his consciousness.[138] In the next chapter, I will devote attention to pursuing Balthasar's kenotic theology and filter from it constructive materials to dialogue with and buttress African liberation theology in the fourth and fifth chapters.

In the final analysis, this chapter has sketched the backdrop of kenotic debates in the development of theology. It serves the function of establishing a relationship between kenosis and liberation theology. Seeing God in relational and not in philosophical terms helps to open up to love and solidarity for the other because it is the way God deals with us.

[138] Rosenberg Randall, "Christ's Human Knowledge: A Conversation with Lonergan and Balthasar," *Theological Studies* 71, no. 4 (2010), 821-825.

CHAPTER THREE

THE KENOTIC THEOLOGY OF HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

INTRODUCTION

Having considered kenosis in both its past and current forms among a wide range of theologians in the previous chapter, I will in this chapter concentrate my attention on kenosis as it is expounded by Hans Urs von Balthasar. Already from the outset, it is important to pinpoint that kenosis is at the heart of Balthasar's theology. To him, it is the most manifest way God has revealed himself to us. What is very particular about Balthasar's theology of kenosis is firstly, the idea of Ur-Kenosis - the primal kenosis – a kenosis involving the entire Trinity. The primal kenosis grounds all subsequent kinds of kenotic undertakings, both divine and human. This understanding of kenosis is significant in that the self-limitation of the Son is not only atypical within the life of Son and neither is it necessarily conditioned by the sin of the human being and the world. Secondly, Balthasar takes kenosis as always being related to the redemptive plan of God for humanity and the world. His theology of kenosis is not therefore aimed at giving an apologetic defence for the full divinity and humanity of Christ as we have seen with the theologians we have treated in the second chapter above. For Balthasar kenosis is an attitude and stance of God which serves as a function of his redemptive plan and mission for the world. Evidently, although his discussion on kenosis is expansive and all-encompassing, and he retrieves its soteriological dimension from the patristics, he nonetheless picks up the debate from modern Lutheran theologians and the theology of Karl Barth.[1]

Like any other person, Balthasar's personal experience, relationships, social contacts, education and formation all contributed in different degrees to his theological vocation and works. Therefore, before we venture into his kenotic theology, it is fitting that we briefly consider his life and accomplishments as a theologian.

[1] Lucy Gardener, David Moss, et al., *Balthasar at the End of Modernity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 40.

1. HANS URS VON BALTHASAR: LIFE, FORMATION, VOCATION AND THEOLOGY

1.1. EARLY YEARS OF LIFE

Hans Urs von Balthasar was born in Lucerne, Switzerland, on 12th August 1905 to an aristocratic family, hence the *von* associated with his name.[2] Because of this he had the opportunity to receive a superior quality of education and to achieve a significant measure of social prominence. For example, through his mother, Balthasar in his early years was already introduced to and got acquainted with Bishop Apor Von Györ of Hungary.[3] He developed a 'cosmopolitan outlook', mastered French and English in addition to his native German and became familiar with the sophisticated lifestyle and conversation of the imperial family, with visitors to the Court, and with wounded soldiers of the First World War. In addition, through his father, Balthasar had connections with Protestantism from his childhood. In fact, his grandparents from his mother's side were protestants.[4]

Balthasar was privileged to have been born in the Golden Age of Swiss education. He started first at the Benedictine school and later at the Jesuit Gymnasium. Because of his immense talent in music, Balthasar in his childhood and youth wavered between academic and musical studies. He was extremely talented in music – a good pianist, and took part in orchestral Masses, operas, concerts, and dances. Later on in his life, he would know all the works of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart by heart and "could picture the score and hear the music in his mind".[5] However, with his transfer from the Benedictine to the Jesuit school, Balthasar's focus changed to the study of literature and philosophy. He pursued further studies in these areas in Vienna, Berlin and Zurich, completing a doctorate in Modern German Literature in 1928.[6]

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[2] Edward T. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption: Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997), 1. Balthasar actually came from an old patrician family in Lucerne that had contributed to the town many officers of varying fields and ranks. For example, his father Oscar Ludwig Carl Balthasar was the responsible for the St. Karli Kirche, a modern Switzerland Church. His mother Gabrielle Pietzcker co-founded the Swiss Catholic Women League and became its first general secretary. His sister Renee was Superior General of the sisters of the Franciscan Sisters of Sainte Marie des Agnes between 1971 and 1988.
[3] Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 1.
[4] Peter Henrici, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work,* ed. David Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 8.
[5] Ibid., 8-9.
[6] Ibid.

From his cradle, Balthasar was gifted with such strong faith as to enable him to pass without wavering through university studies, despite having many encounters with challenging and diverging thoughts prevalent in a secular environment. This faith remained with him, making him pious, childlike, and undeterred in the face of the anti-Christian thinking of his time. In his doctoral dissertation he was thus able to bring a theological perspective to an examination of the history of the eschatological problem in modern German literature.

Up to this time, Balthasar did not have any intention or desire to enter the seminary to be a priest. While attending a retreat conducted for lay students by a renowned Jesuit preacher, he had an overwhelming experience. The conviction struck him like a flash of lightning that it was not for him to choose his vocation. What God wanted of him would eventually become clear to him. At the time the notion of moving from literary to theological studies was considered the kind of major course change that could prove disastrous.[7] Nonetheless, his vocation came to him with such insistence, power and authority that he could not do otherwise than obey.[8] As he later would say, his problem at that time was identifying the precise way in which he could best respond to God's call. As he came to know much later in life, he could have done this as well by being a member of a secular institute.[9]

1.2. SEMINARY FORMATION AND PRIESTHOOD

Balthasar entered the novitiate of the Jesuits in South Germany in 1929. Because of the dull and impersonal style of teaching he found the Aristotelian and Thomistic studies unappealing. He however remained grateful to Erich Przywara, who was not only his teacher, but an excellent mentor. He was instrumental in making Balthasar go beyond the limitations of scholasticism to recovering the Fathers and the scriptures in theology. After the long

[7] Henrici, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life," 11.

[8] Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 2; Henrici, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life," 11-12; What mattered to Balthasar at the time was to give his assent to the call. The vocation to the priesthood and to the Society of Jesus was secondary – explaining why he probably had to leave the Jesuits later. As he himself says, "Even now thirty years later, I could still go to that remote path in the Black Forest, not far from Basel, and find again the tree beneath which I was struck as if by lightning […] And yet it was neither theology nor the priesthood which then came into my mind in a flash. It was simply this: you have nothing to choose, you have been called. You will not serve; you will be taken into service. You have no plans to make; you are just a little stone in a mosaic which has long been ready. All I needed to do was leave everything and follow, without making plans, without wishes or insights. All I needed to do was to stand there and wait and see what I would be needed for".

[9] Henrici, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life,"11-12.

journey of seminary training and formation, Balthasar was ordained a priest on 26th July 1936.

Balthasar's first appointment as a priest was as student chaplain in Switzerland. It is important to remember that during this time the Jesuit's work, whether pastorally or institutionally, was not officially accepted in Switzerland. The Swiss Jesuits juridically belonged to the south German province of the society, but remained relatively independent until it was given the status of vice province in 1947. The major commitment of the Swiss Jesuits of the province was to their pastoral ministry, with members devoted to intellectual or professorial pursuits being scarcely represented. At a time when Swiss Catholicism was undergoing a cultural awakening the arrival of an intellectual who had already written a number of books gave fresh impetus to the Jesuit activities. The young Balthasar was loaded with responsibility for a variety of assignments and he accordingly gave his unreserved contributions to his Society at the time.[10]

1.3. HIS WORKS

Balthasar was a prolific writer and his works cover a diverse range of theological themes and subjects. The climax and summation of his thoughts and works are found in the trilogy. It is *magnum opus* and is divided into three parts each comprising a number of volumes. The 7-volume Glory of the Lord (*Herrlichkeit*) is ranked amongst the foremost theological achievements of our century.[11] It is then followed by 5-volume Theo-Drama (*Theodramatik*) and 3-volome Theo-Logic (*Theologik*). The order of the three is designed to present a systematic theology. According to Balthasar, the beauty of revelation leads to a dramatic action. He gives expression to this conviction when he says that "God does not want to be just contemplated and perceived by us, like a solitary actor by his public; no, from the beginning he has provided for a play in which we all must share".[12] The Theo-Logic (*Theologik)* then gives human meaningful and logical expression of the dramatic event. *The Glory of the Lord* therefore introduces theology based on the good, beautiful and true; the *Theo-Drama* focuses on the human reaction to the actions of God, especially the passion-resurrection drama, and the *Theo-Logic* describes the nature of the relation of Jesus to reality itself, that is, the relation of Christology to Ontology.

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[10] Henrici, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life," 14-17.
[11] Louis Dupre, "The Glory of the Lord: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetic," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, 183.
[12] Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993). 97.

2. THE INFLUENCES ON BALTHASAR

Every theologian is situated in a particular context that influences their thoughts and determines accordingly the subject matter they treat and the approaches and methods they apply to their investigations. Balthasar was no exception. Being a theologian of the modern era, he had to grapple with the problem of making the Christian faith intelligible and relevant and to defend it against the wild and swift currents of modernity that threatened to confuse and undermine the significance of Christianity. Key personalities and their ideas were influential and are considered to have had significant impact on Balthasar's theology. Not that he necessarily expounded on them favorably; more often he critiqued them, exposed the faults in them, brought to light their manipulating tendencies, and used them then as tools to construct his unique Christian theology.

2.1. COLLABORATION WITH ADRIENNE VON SPEYR

The encounter with Adrienne von Speyr[13] had significant influence on Balthasar's life and works just as he in turn had made such a stunning turning point in her life. Under his spiritual direction and guidance, she converted to Catholicism to the amazement of many. The two formed a collaboration that would be fruitful and enriching not only to both of them but to the entire church. In 1945 they founded the community of St. John and set up the publishing house Johannes Verlag for the publication of their works. From this time onwards, Balthasar experienced misunderstanding and ultimately rejection by his confreres and Society. This arose in the main from his close collaboration with Adrienne von Speyr and the Community of St. John which they had set up as a foundation for lay people to commit themselves to special service in the church. In addition, he had a number of personal problems and misfortunes from 1945 to 1950 when he eventually left the Society.[14] He was aware of the pains and uncertainties that would be involved in this decision, but nonetheless saw leaving as an act of obedience to a call from God to particular service in the church, though not necessarily in the Society. He thus had the courage to say:

[13] Henrici, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life," 18-19. Adrienne von Speyr, a medical doctor from Basel, was a well-known figure in Basel because of her humor, sociability, outspokenness and devoted services in her profession. She had turned away from God after the death of her first husband and for years could not say the Our Father, not to mention attend church services.
[14] Ibid., 19-21.

> Whether it be hard or easy, whether or not it be understood, whether the prospects be fair or gloomy, whichever be the darker night – the obedience of satisfying or the obedience of going: What is that to the person who seeks the will of the Lord? And if spiritual Exercises, no. 167 almost inevitably comes true, he will accept it with a grateful heart. And yet what does it matter to him? God ensures that such obedience, if practiced in a childlike way without 'heroism' or arrogance, ends up, not at the edge, but at the very foundation of the Catholic Church.[15]

However, though this appears to have been a personal conviction arrived at independently of outside influences, some people have thought that in large measure it resulted from his close association with von Speyr.[16] The years that followed his resignation from the Society saw grave challenges and difficulties in Balthasar's life. He was left with attachment neither to a diocese nor to a religious group till 2nd February 1956 when he was incardinated into the diocese of Chur. He faced great financial difficulties for his own upkeep and the continuing running of the publishing house. To provide necessary resources he therefore had to move from one university to the other giving lectures and retreats. Despite these difficulties, however, he resolved not to become involved in philosophies that could distract him from his mission, nor to accept positions in otherwise attractive institutions.[17]

2.2. BALTHASAR AND KARL BARTH

The relationship between these two great theologians of the 20th century was a solid and lasting one. Their first contact was in the early years of World War II, but then increased with the transfer of Balthasar to Basel in 1940 and the years that followed. The contact with Barth had significant impact on Balthasar's *Herrlichtkeit*; on the other hand, Balthasar did not have significant influence on Barth because the latter was of a mature age and the direction and development of his *magnum opus*[18] had come to be firmly established over a long period.

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[15] Henrici, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life," 22.
[16] Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 3-4. Von Speyr's life had many unusual aspects and for some current scholars her writings remain difficult to appreciate or even comprehend. Balthasar's close association with her tended to isolate him from the wider world of 20th century theological thinking. Their association was such that at one period he shared a house with her in Basel in order to be her full-time spiritual director. Even in later life he insisted that his works and hers not be separated, thus demonstrating his belief that especially after 1940 his writings owed much to her inspiration.
[17] Henrici, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life," 24. He was for example offered a teaching position by Karl Barth in the Protestant theology faculty, which he rejected.
[18] John Webster, "Balthasar and Karl Barth," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar,* eds. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss, (Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 241-254.

Balthasar's studies and the subsequent contacts with this great protestant theologian resulted in his seminal work *The Theology of Karl Barth* in 1951. It suffices to note that this work influenced his theological development throughout the trilogy. The book is important not so much because of its appreciation and praise of Barth, as for the critical engagement the author has with Barth, particularly his rejection of the analogy of being in favor of the analogy of faith, and his misinterpretation of the Catholic Church's teaching on natural theology and the role of creation. Before this 1951 publication, however, Balthasar had already been studying and writing on Barth. The work was well acknowledged by Barth himself as "the well-known book which Hans Urs von Balthasar addressed to me, in which I find an understanding of the concentration on Jesus Christ in *Church Dogmatics*, and the implied Christian concept of most of the books which I have clustered around me".[19] In studying Barth, Balthasar worked to bridge the gap that existed between Barth and the Catholic estimation of him. Barth opposed catholic theology especially in relation to the *analogia entis* or analogy of being, a position that led him to views which the church in the Council condemned as "anathema".[20]

Balthasar's use of analogy clarifies the question of language about God and mitigated the accumulated tensions around such complex questions as the "relation between grace and nature out of which emerged such issues as natural knowledge of God, the extent of human fallenness or the role of philosophy in religion".[21] For Balthasar, the analogy of being (famous in Catholic doctrine) was not in opposition to the analogy of faith (strongly evident in protestant theology). In fact, according to him they are "two modes of understanding the sole revelation of God in Christ", and therefore they have a significant amount of common ground. Precisely articulated, Balthasar maintains that "the way in which Karl Barth understands the revelation of God in creation from Christ as *analogia fidei*, contains the *analogia entis*; the Christocentric way in which the catholic authors understand the divine world plan, only allows the *analogia entis* to gain its concreteness within the encompassing

[19] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, vol. 4, Part 1: The Subject-Matter and Problems of the Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 768.
[20] John Webster, "Balthasar and Karl Barth," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 248-9. Barth was critical and opposed to catholic theology because of its abstract systematic principle of analogy of being which according to him did not do justice to the categorical assertion of Christ and subjugated the revelation of Christ as realization of already conceived ideas and reality. In response, the Vatican anathematized all those who held to the position that "the one, and true God, our creator and Lord, cannot be known with certainty from things that have been made, by the natural light of human reason". Cf. N P. Tanner (ed), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vol II, Trent to Vatican II* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 804-11.
[21] John Webster, "Balthasar and Karl Barth," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 249.

analogia fidei (in its broadest sense).[22] He thereby clearly showed the integral relationship between Christocentrism[23] and the analogy of being. In this he demonstrated his appreciation of the thinking of Barth. However, faithful to catholic tradition, he advanced beyond Barth's position to present a cogent exposition of the significance of the participation of human beings in their return to God.

2.3. BALTHASAR, ERICH PRZYWARA AND ANALOGY OF BEING

It is not possible to grasp the theology of Balthasar without having an understanding of the discourse of analogy,[24] and how he understands and applies it in answering theological questions. In the catholic theological tradition, the relationship between God and the world or between God and the human beings is to be understood analogously.[25] The analogy of being is therefore a theological discourse that claims to bridge the gap that exists between God and creation. It is considered as a theological answer to the search for appropriate language to use about God who, though infinite and transcendent, relates to what he has created. For Balthasar the analogy of being is the hermeneutical key for theological questions.

Balthasar's use of analogy was very much influenced by Erich Przywara's presentation of the *analogia entis*.[26] Przywara drew his analogy of being from catholic theology's reliance on neo-Thomistic philosophy,[27] and he in addition gave a nuanced definition of the concept of analogy of Joseph Marechal.[28] *Analogia entis* is at the very heart of the theology of Przywara's theology for it unlocks the rigidity that exists between the polarities of God and

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[22] Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation 3rd edit.* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 390; Stephan van Erp, *The Art of Theology: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics and the Foundations of Faith* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 116.

[23] John Wester, "Balthasar and Karl Barth," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 252. The Christocentrism of Barth is of great importance to Balthasar. They both are interested in God's saving actions, in which the transcendent God becomes immanent in Christ by his obedience.

[24] Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 17. The term analogy was invented by Greek mathematicians for solving numerical problems, and later taken over to philosophy for clarifying and explaining non-numerical proportions.

[25] R. Latourelle, R. Fisichella (eds), *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroads, 1995), 9; Erp, *The Art of Theology*, 109.

[26] Przywara was a life-long friend and mentor of Balthasar, a fellow Jesuit who was supportive to him through his seminary formation years and later as admirer and guide in theology. Balthasar published his early writings, and of significant indication of their friendship is the fact that in time of sickness and breakdown in 1947 Balthasar brought him to Basel to stay with him so could care for him.

[27] In his definition of essence and being, Thomas Aquinas came to conclude that it is only in God that there is no distinction between his essence and his existence, whereas the created and finite individuals have their essence as being, but derive their existence from a primordial being.

[28] Erp, *The Art of Theology*, 112-113. Human being's relation to God is defined as an abstract conception whereby the mind tends beyond itself in the direction of the infinite being.

creature and allows flexibility and openness.[29] Thus the problem of polarities would be an impossible one to solve without *analogia entis*, for we would only have two ways out – either we would absorb all into God (theopanism) or absorb God into our nature (pantheism).[30] However Balthasar does admit the insufficiency of analogy in solving this predicament. The revelation of the divine in creation is not an exhaustive one, for great dissimilarity abounds. Crucial in analogy as conceived by Przywara is the conviction that this recognition of the similarity and dissimilarity between God and creation must be born out of faith. It is faith that, in a form of self-denial, inspires a dynamic movement beyond the self towards 'the other'. Only in this exercise can the human person solve the dilemma of, and bridge the gap between God's transcendence and immanence.[31]

Although there are other areas in which Przywara influenced the life and theology of Balthasar (the pathos that characterized his life, devotion, resilience, etc.), his conception of the analogy of being is of particular significance. With this he penetrated and influenced the characteristic priorities of his time, namely the preoccupation with the world or the human person in the world to the exclusion of reference to God.

Balthasar aptly took on the analogy of his mentor and guide. He boldly declared that "the relationship between God and creature must be described as middle ground lying somewhere between the extremes, and this we call analogy. Analogy is an ultimate relation-term: it cannot be explained by any more fundamental reality or non-identity".[32] In his dialogue with Barth, von Balthasar continued to refine his definition of analogy, particularly focusing on the mutuality involved in the meeting of God and the human person so underlined in analogy as opposed to the one-sided movement of God towards the human.

2.4. THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

Despite the fact that Balthasar was successful in completing his theological thought as evident in his *magnum opus* of triptych, which provides logical synthesis of his theological ideas, it is nonetheless difficult to delineate a particular system that would be properly called his method. John O'Donnell has rightly indicated that although Balthasar's trilogy provides a

[29] Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 37.
[30] Ibid., 33; Angela Franz Franks, "Trinitarian Analogia Entis in Hans Urs von Balthasar," *The Thomist* 62, no. 4 (1998), 534.
[31] Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 36. The emphasis on God's omnipotence would deprive the world of its own reality by overwhelming it with God's transcendence as in Luther, and on the other hand a stress on the world would mean engulfing or subjecting God into the world, as in Spinoza.
[32] Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 109.

synthesis of his theology, it does not provide a clear system. Edward T. Oakes, however, considers that certain patterns in Balthasar's thought could be called a method particularly when we pay attention to the order of the trilogy whereby the author attempted to transpose the Christian theology into the platonic transcendental attributes.[33] According to Balthasar the order of the triptych matters, and accordingly he begins with the *Glory of the Lord*, then next the *Theo-drama*, and lastly the *Theo-logic*. He argues that we perceive the Christian revelation with which we are presented first as something beautiful, and to which we respond in a dramatic manner of discipleship. Subsequently, we are led to see Christianity as true and the reason why it is true.[34]

One clear distinctive characteristic aspect of Balthasar's theology is the intrinsic relationship that he affirms between theology and spirituality.[35] In a similar way, Oakes remarks that according to Balthasar, theological form and content cannot be separated.[36] Medard Kehl has pointed out that "for Balthasar, good theology is contemplation brought to conceptualization".[37] It suffices to remember that Balthasar himself had nurtured the conviction that in theology one approaches the Word of God on one's knees with trust in its inherent power to inspire faith.[38] Michele A. Gonzalez thinks that it is not possible to discern a particular method in Balthasar's theology since "to speak of theological method often implies an explicit systematic approach to one's theology", which according to her is missing in Balthasar's theology.[39] However from her studies of Balthasar theology Gonzalez has gathered that for Balthasar, "the material of theology must be governed by the event of revelation, must remain contemporary, and must tie the revelation of today with the tradition of yesterday".[40]

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[33] Oakes, "Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *The Routledge Companion to Modern Christian Thought*, eds. Chad Meister and James Beilby (London, New York: Routledge, 2013), 196-197.
[34] Ibid., 196-97.
[35] John Sachs, "Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *A New Handbook to Christian Theologians*, ed. Donald W. Musser and John L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 496.
[36] Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 108.
[37] Medard Kehl, "Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *The Routledge Companion to Modern Christian Thought*, 35.
[38]Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, vol I, The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A.V Littledale and Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 150.
[39] Michele A. Gonzale, "Hans Urs von Balthasar and Contemporary Feminist Theology," *Theological Studies* 65, no. 3 (2003), www.womenpriests.org/theology/gonzal.asp [accessed November 20 2017].
[40] Gonzale, "Hans Urs von Balthasar and Contemporary Feminist Theology, *Theological Studies* 65, no. 3 (2003), www.womenpriests.org/theology/gonzal.asp [accessed November 20 2017].

3. HIS THEOLOGICAL PROJECT

As already noted above, Balthasar found the Thomistic theology in which he was formed rather dry and inadequate to explicate the richness of the Christian faith. He therefore sought to construct a new theology with theological aesthetics and theo-dramatic theory as the pillars on which Christian theology ought to stand.

3.1. THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS

It is important to note that Balthasar starts his theology from God and his revelation, as the legitimate source for an authentic Christian theology. His firm conviction is that it is God who has first revealed himself to us thus determining the aesthetics as theological starting point. What God has revealed has an inherent beauty that makes revelation self-interpreting and not determined in advanced by some human conceptualization.[41] According to Balthasar, beauty is an expression of the glory of God and it "lies at the heart of Christian mystery".[42] Furthermore, Balthasar contends that "Christian form (Gestalt) is the most beautiful thing that may be found in the human realm".[43] In Balthasar's employment of the category of beauty, he eschews philosophical sense of beauty and talks of beauty as glory of God revealed in the scriptures. And since the cross constitutes the apex of God's revelation in Christ, it is the most beautiful thing that "must knock before itself all inner-worldly concepts of the beautiful, and then by transcending them in a sovereign manner, give them norm and fulfilment".[44] I will not dwell much on this aspect for the reason that my interest in this dissertation lies mainly in the other aspect, the theo-dramatic pillar.

3.2. THEO-DRAMATIC THEORY

The Theo-drama is the second pillar of Balthasar's theology. In constructing his theology, Balthasar conceives of the drama as a fruitful device. From its common use, he gathers that dramatic theatrical phenomenon is not only philosophical, but instinctual as well in its interpretation of the world. Before Balthasar adapts the dramatic theory into his theological vision, he clarifies that his endeavour of employing drama at the service of theology is not in

[41] Jason A. Fout, Fully Alive: *The Glory of God and the Human Creature in Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Theological Exegesis of Scripture* (London: T&T Clark, 2015), 117.
[42] Balthasar, The Glory of the Lord IV, 33.
[43] Balthasar, The Glory of the Lord I, 28.
[44] Balthasar, The Glory of the Lord VII, 316.

any way a transposition of philosophical drama to theology. Rather, he makes it clear that "the theatre will only provide us with a set of resources which, after they have been thoroughly modified, can be used later in theology".[45] Balthasar's central intuition is that with the incarnation, a drama is staged to which all are invited and drawn into action since Christ died and rose for us all. Thus the human agents are not passive observers in this drama, but are all caught up and carried along by the dramatic action that has been initiated.[46] Balthasar makes it clear that in this dramatic action, we are first confronted with the beauty of God's revelation – a brilliant, unique and incomparable event – which does not leave us only transfixed on it but moves us into dynamic response and thus consequently becoming lost in it and transformed by it. What is unique about the theo-dramatic of Balthasar is that the boundaries between the observer and the stage is blurred. He succinctly states that "the boundary between the actor or agent and the auditorium is removed, and man is a spectator only insofar as he is a player: he does not merely see himself on the stage, he really acts on it".[47]

A fundamental difference between the world drama, be it instinctual or philosophical, and the Theo-drama consists in that, it is God acting on the human spectator in the latter– God's revelation is presented to the human being in a form that attracts and moves one into the action. Moreover, what is revealed is unambiguously good. And this goodness is not because it is beautiful or truthful, but because it is an action of God done out of love.[48] In taking part on the stage of the drama, the human character recognises he is playing a much bigger part and therefore he should not be closed in on himself, but rather be prepared to embrace the totality of the vision of the architect of the drama.[49] This means that the divine drama encompasses all the worldly dramas with their uncertainties, obscurities, absurdities as all come to be transcended by the divine drama of love that transforms all into good.[50]

By constructing his theology dramatically, Balthasar expresses the mutual interdependency that involves the exchanges of giving and receiving that are characteristic of the divine mystery and Christian living. For although the author is the creator of the piece of

[45] Theo-drama I, 11.
[46] Ibid., 15.
[47] Theo-drama I, 18.
[48] Ibid., 18-19.
[49] Block Ed, "Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theodrama: A Contribution to Dramatic Criticism," *Renascence* 48, no. 2 (1996), 158. "Each important contributor to the play's realisation succeeds best by abandoning self and entering into an appropriate role."
[50] Theo-drama I, 20-21.

art and gives it its primary unity, he however must allow himself, or give himself over to be displaced or alienated from it by being misinterpreted or misrepresented by the actor or director. He must be ready to accept contradictions that may arise from the interpretation and the stage performance because of the otherness of the actors and the directors of the drama. In the same manner, it is required of the actors and the directors on their part to be faithful as much as they can to the original intention and design of the author of the drama. They have to make efforts to enter into the mind of the author and draw out from the play his or her intended pattern of ideas. In fact, the actor and director depend on the author who has devised the piece of drama. However, to avoid the role of the actor and director being conceived as merely mechanical, Balthasar adds that the author in designing the piece gives room for the creativity of the former in terms of details of gestures, intonation, and others. But this they can only do within the overall unified vision of the author or else it becomes a different performance.[51]

Kevin Mongrain has observed that however much Balthasar considers the contemplation of beauty of God's revelation as decisive for our encounter with God, he believes that "contemplative orientation is only a pre-condition for the practical and ethical dynamic latent in all genuine encounters with beauty".[52] In this way, the form of God's revelation does not need to be explained in speculative abstract theories. It is explained in terms of real and existential events including the ugly and tragic situations which ultimately are transformed into beauty since it is the path of God in Christ who took upon himself pains and suffering. Notwithstanding his emphasis on the visible and practical aspect and impact of the Christian faith, Balthasar does not mean to construct a theology from below. Rather, he believes that "its distinctively dramatic quality will derive from God, in his own revelation and action as director of the play".[53] This is not however, a way of looking at theology as abstraction of ideas because with Theo-drama, Balthasar's theology is far from being articulated as an idea but rather what is important for him is the all-embracing context whereby everything has a centre in God. Nonetheless, he admits that the Theo-drama cannot exhaust the pools of the mystery of God.[54] Karen Kilby, while raising issue with the daring attitude of Balthasar in his Trinitarian theology, particularly his claim to intra-Trinitarian

[51] Theo-drama I, 268-305.
[52] Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 65.
[53] Aidan Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth: A Guide Through Balthasar's Dramatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 49.
[54] Ibid., 61.

vividness, admits that Balthasar gives room to mystery of God; that he cannot say adequately all about God in his theo-dramatic theology.[55]

In the theo-dramatic project, Balthasar in addition to scholarly theology in which he was formed, aims at constructing theology that is "fully in touch with lived Christian life".[56] For he believes that God calls people into a personal relationship, forms them into his likeness so they can be co-workers with him in the world. Thinking in this way, Balthasar argues that contemplation on God is directed to arrive at the active life of witnessing to who God. He contends that from contemplation of God, there necessarily flows action and lived fruitfulness.

In a way, for Balthasar, perception of the revelation of God goes hand in hand with conversion as he endeavours to demonstrate that in the lives of the saints conversion results from their encounter with revelation.[57] This means that without Theo-drama, Balthasar's aesthetics would remain a narrative with no divine action in the world. The Theo-drama, so to say, gives force to the theological aesthetics. For having encountered the revelation, an individual's consciousness is wakened and enlightened resulting in a decision that urges him to action. Thus, accordingly, "the wonder of being, communicating itself in the beautiful, tends of its nature to produce dramatic heroes".[58]

3.3. LATER YEARS AND THE RECEPTION OF HIS THEOLOGY

Because of the many troubles he had fallen into and the resultant suspicion and poor relationship with the Swiss bishops, Balthasar, despite his theological knowledge and expertise, was not invited to the Vatican Council II. However, he worked and wrote prolifically during this time. And because of his unwavering orthodoxy in the period of differing theologies in the name of the spirit of the Vatican Council II, Balthasar started regaining the support and approval of the church hierarchies. In 1969 he was appointed to the Pope's International Theological Commission. He received a number of honors one after another.[59] Remarkable later in his life is the co-founding of the international review

[55] Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2012), 14. Kilby attests that "it is not difficult to find passages in which he specifically acknowledges the limited nature of our knowing, the need for epistemic humility, the inescapable mystery".
[56] Ben Quash, "The Theo-drama," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 143.
[57] Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*: *A Guide Through Balthasar's Dramatics*, 3.
[58] Ibid., 6.
[59] Henrici, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life," 35-36. Balthasar was awarded the following honours: the Roman Guardini Prize of the Catholic Academy of Bavaria in 1971; a Corresponding Fellow of the

Communio in 1973. He greatly devoted and invested his energies in it. He finally died on 26th June 1988 just two days before his elevation to cardinalship.

After having looked at the biographical details of Balthasar, I will now proceed to explore the kenotic ideas that predominate and undergird his theology by means of selected sources and themes. It will become evident that kenosis is central to his conception of the intra-Trinitarian life and the economy of salvation particularly as culminated in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Consequently, according to Balthasar, kenosis ought to animate and determine the nature and mission of the church, and the life and vocation of every Christian.

4. TRINITARIAN KENOSIS

As noted earlier, what is very particular with Balthasar's theology of kenosis is that he locates kenosis in the Trinity, unlike the Lutheran kenotic theologians who emphasized kenosis as the act of the Son alone by his being incarnate. Balthasar maintains that in the Trinitarian procession, the Father's disposition in the procession of the consubstantial Son is that of self-expropriation. Consequently, it follows that the Spirit who is the bond between the Father and the Son, and acts as the personal seal of the expropriation becomes also kenotic.[60] This kind of self-limitation within the Trinity is supra-temporal and acts as the ground and rule for all God's relationships and dealings with creation in history. The conception of the primal kenosis as the backdrop of all God's engagements with the world allows for a perspective in which everything falls within and not outside God and his plan and vision for humankind and the world.

Balthasar concurs with the Russian Orthodox theologian Sergius Bulgakov's assertion that "the Father's self-utterance in the generation of the Son is an initial 'kenosis'".[61] In this act of generation, the Father gives all of himself without holding back anything from the Son, and creates an infinite distance between himself and the generated Son. This affirmation is important for Balthasar because Jesus Christ is able to bring about the salvation of the world

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British Academy in 1973; an Associé étranger of the French Academy on his 70th birthday; the von Balthasar symposium started in 1977 at the Catholic University of America in Washington, and he received an honorary doctorate from the same university in 1980; he also received from the hands of Pope John Paul II the highest honour of the International Paul VI Prize in 1984, and in 1985, when a symposium on "Adrienne von Speyr and her Ecclesial Mission" was organized in Rome in honour of his birthday; he received his final honour, the Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Prize in 1987.

[60] Theo-drama IV, 331.

[61] Ibid., 323.

because he is God.[62] Accordingly, it can be believed that the acts that he accomplishes are beyond the capacity of a mere human. The entire Trinity is involved in the life and mission of the Son to the inclusion of his passion and death. Seen from this perspective, what is known to us about God in his revelations and dealings with us speaks about who God is in himself.

At the background of Balthasar's nuanced emphasis that the Son is our pathway into the Trinitarian life is his discontent with modern theological rationalism which he accuses of elevating human being and reason to be the yardstick of religion. Kevin has observed that Balthasar's discontent with modern rationalism does not however lie in its denial of the existence of God as mysterious being. His problem is that it attempts "to construct *a priori* explanatory system that denied regulative primacy to non-explanatory symbols".[63] The concern of Balthasar is precisely that God's plan cannot be explained conceptually. We can explain it only in the life of Christ who is the revelation of who God is and what his plan is for what he has created. In Christ therefore, God opens up for his creatures the possibility of participation in his life. Balthasar however goes further to argue that whilst we cannot meaningfully explain God without going via God's revelation in Christ, we must always make our way back to the Trinity. In other words, it is via the Economic Trinity that we arrive at the Immanent Trinity. The conviction of Balthasar is that "any Trinitarian theology that deviates from a Christocentric and historical norm risks either treating the mystery of the trinity as an inscrutable philosophical proposition that is beyond all comprehension and thus without any direct relevance to the life of the faith".[64] It is on the basis of this that Balthasar makes the unequivocal assertion that:

> There is only one way to approach the Trinitarian life in God: on the basis of what is manifest in God's kenosis in the theology of the covenant - and thence in the theology of the cross – we must feel our way back into the mystery of the absolute, employing a negative theology that excludes from God all intramundane experience and suffering, while at the same time presupposing that the possibility of such experience and suffering - up to and including its Christological and Trinitarian implications – is grounded in God.[65]

[62] Theo-drama IV, 319.
[63] Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 54.
[64] Ibid., 58.
[65] Theo-drama IV, 324.

This feeling of our way back to the Trinitarian mystery is not an abstract mental exercise of contemplating God. Instead, it means focusing our attention on the life of Christ as the blueprint for our life's situations. This is an active endeavour in which we strive to be receptive to what has been revealed and make it our own with all the demands it impresses on us, not to the exclusion of suffering and isolation since we know that these aspects are not only important but in fact determinant in what we have received, but which at the same time have all been surmounted and turned into good by Christ.[66]

In this way, Balthasar brings freshness to the Trinitarian discourse, especially with his theo-dramatics that avoids the philosophical categories of essence and accidents of Neoplatonism in relation to discourse about the life of the Trinity, and deploys in their stead relational categories, particularly of love, kenosis, giving and receiving. Aware that he would be accused of tampering with the oneness of God with these categories, Balthasar pursues his Trinitarian theology to arrive at a monotheistic conception of God. Ben Quash has argued that Balthasar's kenotic inter-Trinitarian relationship of mutual exchange of giving and receiving is actually the ground for the unity of the Trinity.[67] Balthasar has pithily articulated it thus, "the Father generates the Son in love and the Son knows that his own essence consists in returning this love in the same infinite perfection in which he has received both it and himself from the Father".[68]

4.1. SUFFERING AND THE POWERLESS POWER OF GOD

Taking the book of Revelation, Balthasar observes that although God is portrayed as "removed from us and untouched by the world's events,"[69] he nonetheless is different from the philosophical idea of God as a principle detached from the world. This is made manifest in the life of the Son who, though sharing the same dignity and sitting on the same throne with God the Father is nonetheless involved in, and committed to the world. Furthermore, the Father holds nothing back from the Son when he gives over to him his prerogatives. To this effect, the unity that exists between the Father and the Son does not consist of and end only with the Trinitarian procession but extends to incorporate fully the mission of the Son. This unity guarantees the victory of the Father in the Son to the effect that the Son is worshipped

[66] Theo-drama IV, 59.
[67] Ben Quash, "Theo-drama," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 151.
[68] Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 186.
[69] Theo-drama IV, 52.

"together with God and as God".[70] Above all, the victory that earns this honour had to be preceded by the passion to which the Son subjected himself. Therefore, it can be said that if God so desired to restore the glory of his name through the suffering of the Son, it can rightly be maintained that God himself "suffers at the world's hands" with regard to his exterior honour which he is supposed to enjoy in his creation but which nonetheless was damaged by it.[71]

At this point, Balthasar then postulates that in the act of the primal kenosis, something happens in God because God gives himself to the Son unreservedly, but yet without diminishing himself. In this way, God can be said to share in the suffering of the world in the works and mission of the Son. God incomprehensively separates himself from himself.[72] He cannot thus be God without limiting himself. His omnipotence, in a way, must be seen to reside in his kenosis, and kenosis is therefore a characteristic proper of God. His omnipotence lies in the truth that he is capable of giving the 'gift', which Balthasar is convinced is the most powerful thing.[73] The powerfulness of God is simultaneous with his powerlessness because in this act of giving, the Father empties himself, although without diminishing himself. For "Christ's living for God simultaneously implies that God lives for him, superabundantly…"[74]

Karen Kilby has rightly emphasised that according to Balthasar, kenosis does not begin with the cross or incarnation "but in the Father's generation of the Son".[75] The cross then gives expression of the inner life of the Trinity. She goes further to observe that according to Balthasar, it is not enough to say Jesus suffered, but it is more significant to say that the Son of God suffered not only the cross, but also rejection and abandonment. And despite her reservation with some of the nuances Balthasar adds to this discussion she nonetheless admits that this way of looking at the Trinity is more fruitful as it tends to mitigate the idea of an angry God who unfairly punishes an innocent party because in Balthasar's novel perception, God himself takes "into his own life the necessary conflict between sin and love".[76]

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[70] Theo-drama IV, 54.
[71] Ibid., 55.
[72] Ibid., 324-25.
[73] Ibid., 326
[74] Ibid., 63.
[75] Kilby, Balthasar: *A (Very) Critical Introduction*, 100.
[76] Ibid., 101-102.

4.2. THE FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIP: KENOTIC GIVING AND RECEIVING

The relationship between the Father and the Son can best be described as turning to the other in total self-surrender and reciprocity that generates true exchange. The Trinitarian persons are not therefore merely isolated individuals existing vis-a-vis the others but are mutually bound together in being, will and purpose.[77] It is a relationship in which God is seen as "sharing his full divine freedom with the begotten Son, and sharing it ultimately irrevocably and forever".[78] The Father therefore gives what he is, and not what he has. In reciprocity, the Son gives himself to the Father without reservation.[79] This self-giving of the Son is not however to be conceived as compulsion to a superior or powerful father (Arianism), but it is done out of the liberty of the Son (homousious). In fact, in figuring out the initiator of the mission of the Son, Balthasar posits that the initial proposition must have come from the Son, "that he offers himself to the Father in order to sustain and save the work of creation. And it seems to me that this proposition of the Son touches the heart of the Father – humanly speaking – more profoundly even than the sin of the world…"[80] In the salvific will of the Trinity, therefore, the Father gives the Son the freedom to accomplish the salvific acts as his initiative without compulsion. The Son has full scope to exercise his freedom and choice. The Father's reliance on the decisions that the Son makes in accomplishing out the salvific plan is kenotic.

According to Balthasar, in the relationship between the Father and the Son, there is inherently embedded the paradox of joy and suffering. He sees that indeed, the life of Jesus as God-man is marked by paradoxes which are characteristically difficult to fathom. The extreme distance created between the Father and the Son by the latter's taking on of the sinful conditions of humanity is at the same time the cause of their profound intimacy since the Father wills it and the Son accepts it out of obedience, but in his free will.[81] Furthermore, through this distance, the sinful world is transposed into the Trinitarian life and therefore finds reconciliation with God. Because of this noblest effect, the Son's entry into darkness brings light to the damned. In these paradoxes, however, Balthasar observes that this extreme

[77] Theo-drama, V, 105.
[78] Ibid., 83.
[79] Ibid., 84.
[80] Balthasar and von Speyr Adrienne, *To the Heart of the Mystery of Redemption*, trans. Anne Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 37.
[81] Theo-drama V, 261-262.

interpenetration does not attempt to underestimate the greatness and uniqueness of each of the aspects – divine and human – involved in the life of the Son.[82] In Balthasar's conception, the separation of the Son from the Father is their greatest unity even in the radical departure of the incarnation. In Jesus Christ, the Son of God simultaneously becomes man's response to him so that God who makes choice becomes mingled with the object of the choice. This dynamic exchange is rather strange, portraying as it does the concept of God embracing the inherent confusion of the divine being submerged in the human and thus risks losing his being divine into manhood.[83] It is a cost that inevitably arises out of the portrayal of the Son's life as mirror into the nature of God who lowers himself out of love for what he has created.

Their separation reveals their profound unity so that the Son's suffering on the cross does not mean an alienation from the Father but a revelation of their unity – with the Father in the Son and the Son in the Father. The Son remains more united to the Father than he is to the world because although he is physically in the world, he is rejected by the world, and at the moment of agony, it is to the Father that he turns in a cry of dereliction and not to some human power or authority. Therefore, the Son in his extreme separation experiences the presence of the Father in the profoundest way. Balthasar sees that because of the extreme suffering and separation experienced by the Son not only physically but also spiritually, "there must be reciprocal personal forsakenness on the part of the Father and the Son, for only then can the 'highest possible summit of revelation be realised…".[84] Because the Father is in absolute unity with the Son, the Father also experiences abandonment in the suffering of the Son so that what happens on the cross is not only the will of the Son but also of the Father.[85] In the forsakenness of the Son, the Father shows that he is profoundly present and united with his Son in a loving relationship. Even in the nothingness or finitude of the Son, especially evident on the cross, the infinite Trinity is concomitantly present. In the final analysis, Balthasar concludes that this is a mystery which we cannot comprehend with our limited understanding.[86]

4.3. CREATED FREEDOM AS GOD'S SELF LIMITATION

[82] Theo-drama IV, 362.
[83] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 26.
[84] Theo-drama V, 263.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.

In creating, God gives himself to that which he has created, but yet it is in this act of creating that his powerfulness also consists. Mindful of the danger of conflating the idea of God into that which he has created, Balthasar is keen to maintain that it is important to uphold first the existence of God in himself so that whatever the creature strives to accomplish, is ultimately considered as human's desire to enter into union with the source, the Trinitarian mystery.[87] In this regard, all that results from human endeavours becomes a reflection of the eternal essence, although it can never be identical with it and neither will its individuality be obliterated by its incorporation in the infinite divine. According to Balthasar, then, the only way to maintain a healthy relationship between the creature and creator is by building a bridge "between the creature's 'abiding in itself' and its 'abiding in God'".[88] And this is only possible because of the kenotic nature of God that allows for the participation of the creature in God without subsuming the latter into the former. Matthew A. Rothaus Moser has rightly observed that, "Balthasar's logic of kenotic love has significant implications for his understanding of the God-world relation".[89] It allows creation to be seen to derive its being from the Trinitarian event of love and which becomes the archetype for the created order. Creation therefore becomes a participation in the life of the Trinity which is characteristically kenotic love although it can never be God and neither can God be reduced to it. Creation therefore stands as a reality on its own, but always something received. In the created freedom of the creature, a response to the invitation of the creator is given; and this freedom can either be a yes or no to the invitation of the creator.

Balthasar considers it important to first establish the permanence of creaturely existence within the immanent presence of God before proceeding to consider the undeniable freedom of the former.[90] Accordingly, he maintains that the creature is created for eternal life, but this does not mean the creature beholds the face of God as if he has arrived at a particular object. Instead, it is a lived life since "God is not an object but a life that is going on eternally and yet ever a new".[91] This participation of the creature in God is enabled by the spirit of God that dwells within the soul of the human person. And drawing on the life and works of John of the Cross and Eckhart, Balthasar argues that the human person is then required to submit

[87] Theo-drama V, 67.
[88] Ibid., 83.
[89] Matthew A. Rothaus, *Love Itself is Understanding Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology of the Saints* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 159.
[90] Theo-drama V, 394.
[91] Ibid., 425.

himself to the workings of God so that "the Father gives birth to the Son through the soul",[92] while conversely, in the process of giving birth to the Son, "the soul gives birth to itself in the Son".[93] Therefore, it is by participation in God that the human persons authentically realises himself because God is the ground for every existence.

5. CHRISTOLOGICAL FOUNDATION AND VISION

Balthasar's theology, although it includes a strong Trinitarian dimension, is developed in major part from a deep and comprehensive vision of the mystery of Christ. So, it is arguable to say his theology is a Trinitarian theology. For him the pivotal point around which everything revolves is Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became one like us and has invited us to participate in the divine life. Mark A. McIntosh has posited that Jesus Christ stands at the centre of Balthasar's theology.[94] There is therefore no doubt that Balthasar's theology is heavily Christological.[95] In his conception of history and God's dealings with humanity prior to Christ, he argues that - particularly in the choice of Israel which Balthasar sees as 'dramatic' - God's engagements with humanity were all geared towards the incarnation of God in Christ.[96] It is only through Christ that the collaboration that God sought with human beings is possible. He alone bridges the gap between eternity and time.[97] It is in Christ that God guarantees the free participation of sinful humanity who because of their tendency to fall

[92] Theo-drama V, 440.
[93] Ibid., 441.
[94] Mark A. McIntosh, "Christology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 24.
[95] Anne M. Carpenter in her exploration of the use of 'image' in Balthasar's theology has established that the Son as the 'image' of the Father undergirds the relationship between the divine and human nature. With this Christological control, Balthasar can elevate the human nature to participation in the divine life without obfuscating their differences. Anne Carpenter, *Theo-Poetics: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Risk of Art and Being* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2015), 118-119. Similarly, Stephen Long has argued that following Barth, Balthasar locates ethics within the Christological locus. Stephen Long, *Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Preoccupation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 219. Conceived this way, a Christian who lives by faith must base his moral activity on faith. Ibid., 223. Long goes further to state that at the heart of Balthasar's critique of political theology is his fear that it tends to get stuck in rationalist abstractions while losing the Christological centre, which according to him is safeguarded in the Theo-drama. Ibid., 225. Furthermore, Junius Johnson demonstrates how Christ is for Balthasar the first principle of metaphysics: "In Christ, who is human and divine, a human nature is able to be raised above any competing claims of other human natures because it has been assumed into dignity and worth of divinity via personal union. This formula… subordinates all worldly norms to the norm of Christ". Junius Johnson, *Christ and Analogy: The Christocentric Metaphysics of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 109-110. In the same vein, Mark McInroy, from his investigation of Balthasar's doctrine of spiritual senses, has remarked that Balthasar claims that "the object of the spiritual sense is the Word in Christ". Mark McInroy, *Balthasar on the Spiritual Senses: Perceiving Splendour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 59.
[96] Theo-drama IV, 205
[97] Guido Vergauwen, "Karl Rahner and Hans von Balthasar: Two Christological Models which Constructively Accept Modernity," in *Jesus Christ Today: Studies in Christology in Various Contexts*, ed. Stuart George Hall (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 224-231.

into sin and accordingly deserve God's wrath, are reconciled and drawn into God's life.[98] In the Son "the transcendental is directly present and manifest in the categorical".[99] In him God is present in world history to guide mankind to its destiny in God. This presence supersedes any postulated presence found in other religious traditions and philosophies. The decisive action of God in the world therefore rests in Christ, and he is the only way to the Father. According to this claim then, Jesus de-sacralised the state, de-sacralised the world, and subordinated all mystical religions and philosophies to himself alone.[100] As rightly stated by Mograin Kevin, according to Balthasar, all religious or theological discourses that do not comply with monotheistic Christocentrism are gnostic. In reaching this conclusion Balthasar implicitly rejects any qualification based on the theological positions of these religious movements.[101] This simply demonstrates how decisively Balthasar is committed to the Christocentric theology.

It can therefore be affirmed that the theology of Balthasar is first and foremost Christological. The aspect of it that is Trinitarian serves to advance the legitimacy and function of Christ's life and his theo-dramatic action in the economic dispensation. The focus of our discussion of the theology of kenosis will accordingly heavily weigh on the kenosis of the Son as he relates to the Father, on the one hand, and to the church creation on the other. The Holy Spirit's kenotic role will not be treated in itself as such, although it will unavoidably come in as a corollary to the kenotic treatment of the Son and his relations to the Trinity and the created beings.

5.1. THE DIVINE LIFE OF THE SON

Balthasar makes it clear that the life of the Son is intrinsically kenotic. The passive response from the Son to be begotten does not come second to the demand of the Father. Rather, the passive action of the Son comes before the active action of the Father in begetting the Son. It involved the willingness to "allow oneself to be brought to birth, to separate oneself, really and in fact, from what is one's own".[102] In a way, Balthasar argues that the Son's act of the incarnation was self-alienating for "although God disposes of Jesus in the passion and at the hour of abandonment, Jesus himself also disposes of himself by giving his effective assent in

[98] Theo-drama IV, 229.
[99] Ibid., 433.
[100] Ibid., 443.
[101] Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 33.
[102] Theo-drama V, 85; Michele M. Schumacher, "The Concept of Representation in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Theological Studies* 60 (1999), 64.

advance to all that his Father will do with him".[103] This is the antecedent kenosis that predicates the subsequent kenotic life of the Son in the mission. And it is on account of it that we can speak of mutual gratitude between the Father and the Son: The Father's gratitude to the Son for allowing himself to be begotten and the Son's gratitude to the Father for the gift of being begotten.

Balthasar conceives that the Trinitarian procession in which the Son is generated by the Father is linked to his mission. His mission is linked to his being Son so that it is only right to say that Jesus does not only have a mission, but he is the mission as "he becomes the personification of it".[104] And if there is anything that Jesus is conscious of, it is the fact that he is on a mission given to him by the Father. In this way, Balthasar traces Jesus' mission, with its kenotic character, to the Trinitarian procession.[105] It is precisely in this humiliation that his love for the Father as well as the world is made manifest. It is at the point where he is the weakest, humiliated and placed under trial by worldly powers that he declares he is the king (Jn 18:37). And Balthasar alluding to this states that, "the kingship of God, who reveals himself as love, is shown to us in the humble obedience of the Son to the Father, and so we are shown that this obedience is essentially love. It is certainly the model for human love before the majesty of God, but more than that, it is the supreme image of divine love itself appearing".[106]

The consequence of this primal obedience will be decisive in the life and mission of Jesus Christ in the world. Of special significance is the Trinitarian inversion, whereby the Son, who is the second person of the Trinity submitted himself to the Holy Spirit, who is the third person of the Trinity, to be guided and driven by him. During the incarnation then, the Son depends on the Holy Spirit for the communication of the will and strength from his Father until the moment when he accomplishes his mission with the resurrection. And it is only after his glorification that the Son is able to send the Holy Spirit having retaken his rightful place at God's right hand.[107]

5.2. JESUS' FILIAL OBEDIENCE TO THE FATHER

[103] Balthasar and Speyr, *To the Heart of the Mystery of Redemption*, 22.
[104] Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way to Revelation*, 71.
[105] Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction*, 96.
[106] Balthasar, *Love Alone: The way to Revelation,* 71.
[107] Theo-drama IV, 364.

According to Balthasar, the internal attitude of Son to the Father is that of obedience. This is the eternal kenosis of the Son on which all his actions flow. If the Son is eternally disposed kenotically to the Father, then kenosis is "one of the definite aspects of [the] eternal life" of the Son,[108] and that is seen in the life of the incarnated Son, particularly in his obedience even unto death.[109] Jesus, although he is God, is not in full control of the course of things in his life to the extent that his life is driven forward towards the hour. And although what is to come does not lie beyond his existence, nonetheless, it transcends his present activities. He accepts all sufferings as having been ordained eternally by God and he has to accept and undergo unconditionally.[110] Balthasar thinks that it is in the obedience of the Son that his priestly character comes to bear. He is not only the sacrifice that is offered, but he also surrenders himself freely and wilfully. And it is precisely this self-sacrificial death in obedience to the Father that makes his sacrifice different from other sacrifices.[111]

The obedience of the Son to the Father allows for the complete incalculable flow of the power of grace from the latter to the former: The Son looks up to the Father, and receives in love all the love of the Father that he in turn gives to others, and in so doing gives the Father in return everything (even the little love that he receives from the world). And because love lives from giving, this act of giving strengthens him and nourishes him".[112] Balthasar sees that Jesus' life is marked by a "particular pattern of loving trust and obedience, an infinite desire to speak the truth of the Father's loving into the furthest and most alienated corners of creation."[113] This awareness guides and marks every unfolding in Jesus' life. In fact, it can be said that his life is a commitment to live daily as an obedient Son of his Father and to reveal who truly the Father is. The purpose of his life is therefore not to reveal his sovereignty or his superiority as compared to other personalities, but it is all about obediently fulfilling the mission of the Father in love. Jesus then can be said to be "dispossessed out of love of God – to become the 'lamb of God who bears the guilt of the world'".[114] The rule of the life of Jesus is therefore that of obedience to the will of his Father and he lives to do it to the very end, up to the point of giving up his very life.

5.3. THE SON'S SELF- LIMITEDNESS

[108] Theo-drama V, 123.
[109] Ibid., 128.
[110] Theo-drama IV, 234.
[111] Ibid., 241.
[112] Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions*, 66.
[113] Mark A McIntosh, "Christology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 28.
[114] Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way to Revelation*, 81.

Because of the distance created between the Son and his Father by taking on the condition of human beings, the Son must be willing to experience abeyance of the vision of the Father. As man, he must strive to attain and maintain the awareness of his divinity.[115] According to Balthasar this does not mean the Son ceases being God. There is unbroken unity between the internal Trinitarian procession and mission of the Son. In this consideration, the humanity of Jesus can be said to be already available in the Father's will.[116] Thinking this way is fruitful in that it portrays a Christology from both above and below. It gives us the limitation in the Son as he takes upon himself the mission of descending into the realm of the human beings, while at the same time maintaining his connectedness to his Father. As Balthasar asserts, "he has renounced his divine knowledge and given it into the Father's keeping,"[117] out of trust and obedience to the Father.

However, despite Balthasar's extensive treatment of the self-limitation of the Son that arises from the incarnation, he nonetheless affirms that the Son retained the eternal knowledge of time so that he remains eternal within the transient and historic time "and that everything temporal about him always has an eternal side".[118] But this eternal time, he notes, is always within transitory time addressing each moment and to be determined in it.[119] Balthasar then posits that it is in this regard that we see that although Jesus is constantly conscious of the coming of the hour – and this hour does indeed determine the quality of his choices – he nonetheless does not lay claim to the knowledge of that hour because he leaves it to the Father alone.[120]

In the conception of Balthasar, Jesus is definitely aware of the formal scope and not the content of his mission. The details are left to the Father who communicates them to him through the Holy Spirit. Balthasar believes that from here we can get the answer to the question of whether Jesus had knowledge of the coming hour or not as both yes and no: "No, he did not because it is essential to the obedience of Jesus toward his mission to anticipate nothing. The hour belongs to the Father; and no one knows it, neither men nor angels nor the Son,"[121] and Yes, Jesus is aware of the imminent hour because "Jesus knows at least that the hour will contain what is essential, the dénouement of his tragic failure with respect to

[115] Theo-drama V, 125.
[116] Ben Quash, "The Theo-drama," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 150.
[117] Theo-drama V, 127.
[118] Ibid., 128.
[119] Ibid., 130.
[120] Ibid., 325.
[121] Balthasar and Speyr, *To the Heart of the Mystery of Redemption*, 21.

Israel."[122] He waits for the hour, which is unforeseeable for him, as for an ordinary person, although his life is bound up and driven by this hour which his life anticipates.[123]

The Son's reliance on the Father, Balthasar observes, is so strong that he turns to him even when the latter does not seem to be present. Balthasar thus vividly avers:

> But when at the Father's bidding, the long expected 'hour' eventually comes, and Jesus rises from table and goes out into the darkness (see Jn 14:31), then that steadying pedal note seems to die away. The source of life from the Father is sealed off; the Father's presence is withdrawn, his light extinguished – and the Son, bearing the sin of the world, is abandoned by the Father (see Mk 15:34). Yet this state of abandonment, throughout which the Son does not cease to cry out to the Father, despite the Father's being concealed, is rather like a sculptor's mould or a photographic negative in its relation to the positive reality of a presence and a union that can never be disturbed.[124]

5.4. THE SON'S SUBJECTION TO THE PASSION AND DEATH

To Balthasar the passion and death of Jesus Christ constitute the apex of his life and mission because it is firstly the ultimate response of obedience he gives to his Father and, secondly in it the liberation of human beings is possible because "the human destiny of death is undergirded by the death of Jesus Christ".[125] Taking this position further, Balthasar argues that seen from the perspective of the biblical testimony, the death of Jesus has twofold inseparable aspects: firstly, the Son surrenders himself to God's forsakenness and powerlessness and thus offers a basis for every instance of forsakenness on the part of the creature. Secondly, the death of Jesus Christ is "the proclamation of an absolute love, an absolute love that originates in the triune being of God."[126]

In dying the Son does not cease to live but on the contrary, in it life is demonstrated in its extreme loneliness of loving obedience to the Father. However, in the death of Jesus, we are confronted with a mind-boggling question of what kind of power the Father possesses at the moment when his beloved undergoes suffering and death without him intervening to rescue

[122] Balthasar and Speyr, *To the Heart of the Mystery of Redemption*, 22.
[123] Theo-drama IV, 235.
[124] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 44.
[125] Theo-drama V, 325.
[126] Ibid., 327.

him. Balthasar then contends that the Son's death is finite but testifies to infinite and undying love between him and the Father. Moreover, "his life is 'laid up' with the Father".[127] Nonetheless, at the cross, the Son has become nothing but a finite being and his separation from the Father is evidently more manifest than at any other stage of his life and ministry. In fact, it is at this point that we have an insight into the eternal being of God for it is here that their unity is demonstrably seen.[128] The cross is the summit of Jesus' life and so it is the clearest revelation of who God the Father is. For if the Son became a human being to reveal God to the world, and the cross is the apex of his earthly life, then it is precisely here that God's life is communicated in an incomparable manner.[129] On it, divine freedom frees and embraces all the non-divine freedoms. The passion or the cross validates Jesus' ministry of preaching and healing.

Balthasar contends that it is so central that, "if one interprets the passion as a subsequent catastrophe produced by some accident, every word, not excluding the sermon on the Mount, becomes unintelligible".[130] Everything the Son did must be seen in the light of the hour for it is the climax of his life well spent "in self-effacing service to all men".[131] It is in the apparent absence of God in the cry of dereliction that we see God in such a definitive clarity. Balthasar posits that it is this concealment "which turns our gaze to it and makes the eyes of faith take notice.[132] Balthasar however dismisses the idea that God needs creation in order for him to be God. Therefore, if the Christian God decided to reveal himself in the ungodly, in suffering, pain and shame, it is not to complete who he is, but he does so out of divine love which he wants to share with what he has created.[133] Balthasar draws our attention to the hour as the most decisive and most revealing of the nature of the relationship of the Son to the Father. What is very evident from the time of his mission of preaching and ministry which climaxed with the washing of the feet of the apostles, is that Jesus is in charge of the course of events. However, from the Mount of Olives, there is a moment of abrupt transition and he hands over all into the designs of the Father out of his free will and in obedience to the Father's will.[134]

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[127] Theo-drama V, 327-328.
[128] Ibid., 328.
[129] Rowan Williams, "Balthasar and the Trinity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 37.
[130] Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way of Revelation*, 69.
[131] Ibid., 69.
[132] Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 52.
[133] Rowan Williams, "Balthasar and the Trinity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 38.
[134] Theo-drama IV, 396.

It suffices to note that the life and ministry of Jesus have a direct implication for his church and those who believe in him. In what follows I will explore Balthasar's conception of the significance of God's kenotic self-giving in Christ for the church and the believers in Christ.

6. ECCLESIOLOGICAL EXISTENCE AS THE EMBODIMENT AND CONTINUATION OF THE KENOTIC LIFE OF THE SON

According to Balthasar, the church is a community of Christ's disciples to whom he not only entrusted the fruits of his passion and death, but also indeed gave his very self. He will live here, be celebrated and be given to the world. The church does not therefore live for herself, but for Christ for she is built on the pattern of him who is the head. And consequently, the holiness of its bodily existence thereby depends on the readiness to surrender to him.[135] Furthermore, Balthasar is convinced that "the church as the prolongation of Christ's mediatorial nature and work possesses a knowledge that comes by faith".[136] Therefore the life of the church is derived from belief in Jesus Christ. And if that is the case, according to Balthasar, it follows that its conviction is derived from the preoccupation of Jesus Christ himself; he who walked with human beings and appeared on their paths after they had turned away from God's ways. In the same way, inspired by its head, the church goes out to people in their isolated location and calls them to life, and life in abundance.

It is however important to note that although Balthasar attaches such significant role to the church, he is critical about the present state of the church of his time. He advocates for a servant and evangelising church and not a church that is closed in on its pride and glory. He acknowledges the church's struggle on the path to holiness. He does not keep a blind eye to the fact that the church is comprised of members who are liable to sin. He explores this under the theme of "chaste prostitute".[137] This recognition of the fragility of the church makes her rely on Christ her head for guidance and holiness.

Balthasar contends that the church cannot do anything independent from Christ. Thus, the action of Christ, namely the movement of Christ into the world (towards sinful humanity),

[135] Theo-drama IV, 395-398.
[136] Theo-drama V, 131.
[137] Stephen Long, *Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Preoccupation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 218-218. Also cf. Balthasar, *Exploration in Christian Theology, vol. 2: Spouse of the World*, trans. A.V. Littledale and Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 198.

and taking upon himself suffering for our sanctification, is the starting point of the church and which then draws us to him: "from the sacrificing church, through Christ, to God".[138] This connection must not be lost, for it is in the death of Christ that Christians are baptised, united and grow together.[139] In this regard, Balthasar asserts that:

> Every Eucharistic sacrifice on the part of the church always proceeds on the basis of a communion with Christ that he has already initiated and has the effect of creating a new and ever-deeper communion … and baptism rests on a prior deed of Christ wrought on behalf of all mankind. So the church's Eucharist action can be read backward from the end to the beginning.[140]

The church's action is therefore not of its own, and does not depend necessarily on its inner relationship (in terms of its being righteous or unrighteous) with Christ. Rather, what happens in it is an outburst of God's miracles, an outflow of Christ's mercy and grace. It is Christ's action in the church that draws and inspires the followers of Christ. As Christians therefore, we become formed into Christ, and "become obedient with him; but incorporated into his freedom, we also become truly free".[141] Balthasar contends that the life of Christ is made more abundant in the sacrament of the Eucharist. For in it, the church does not only remember Christ's mysterious actions, but she in fact makes present these merits and takes initiative, assuming responsibility on behalf of Christ in the world.[142]

6.1. THE PEDAGOGICAL VOCATION OF THE CHURCH

According to Mongrain, Balthasar considers the church as a living organism in which Christ himself lives and, in it there is an '"indissoluble nexus' between the Christ-event and the church's interpretation of it in faith".[143] The church, in words and deeds, mediates the mysteries of Christ to the world. In obedience to the mission of Christ, the church lives and makes present the love of Christ in the social setting in which she finds herself. And in order to fulfil this task, the church must submit itself to its redeemer's love and makes it manifestly

[138] Theo-drama IV, 403.
[139] Ibid., 403.
[140] Ibid., 405.
[141] Ibid., 406.
[142] Ibid., 399.
[143] Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 109.

alive in its life. There must be a feeling of imperative duty by the church so that it can rise above the personal inclinations that are opposed to the mandate of the mission entrusted to it by Christ its head.[144]

Balthasar is however aware of the danger of the reductionism that could easily result from maintaining the privileged position that the church enjoys. He therefore is keen to uphold the ontological asymmetry that characterises the creator-creature relationship. At any rate, Balthasar holds together in tension the doxological paradox whereby what is revealed is for the mutual glorification of both the creator and creature notwithstanding their ontological difference. Accordingly, although the spiritual elements are vertically bestowed on the church from on high, it is nonetheless through its visible reality that grace is communicated in the church. Thus, in this way, Balthasar upholds the sacramental nature of the church with its sacramental tradition as biblical and liturgical community. He contends that we first experience Christ in the church's sacraments and, it is only then that we are enabled to talk about him theologically. Although Balthasar affirms the institutional nature of the church with its traditional and sacramentality, he guards against losing connection with the vertical axis (God) from whom it derives its life-force. The church is therefore called upon to integrate and embody the two aspects: the transcendental and institutional natures of its being.

The church, as a visible reality in the world, is a special arena in which God's form is preserved and communicated to the world. Its purpose in the vision of God is mystagogical. Precisely, the church lives and teaches the world the virtues of faith, love and hope, a mission that involves affirming God as the other while allowing for active self-giving according to the form of God which has been received.[145] In reference to the world, there is a sense in which it can be said that Balthasar thinks the church exists for the sake of the world, as mediator between God and the world. For that matter, she is called to a life that embodies the Trinitarian life of unity and love overriding division, rivalry and individuality. The church is therefore a servant and shares in Christ's redemptive work for the world. All her life is geared towards this and she exhibits this as a rule of life so that "there exists no other difference between the celebration of the sacraments and our everyday existence".[146]

6.2. THE CONDITIONED FRUITFULNESS OF THE CHURCH

[144] Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way to Revelation*, 96-97.
[145] Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 123-125.
[146] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 133-134.

The church, Balthasar contends, is a living expression of the Trinitarian life because it is only through it that Christ extends the Father's sovereignty out into the world. Precisely, the Holy Spirit in the church continues to glorify the Father and the Son who have kenotically submitted themselves to the church. It is therefore the Holy Spirit that ensures that the church continually becomes the dwelling for the Father and the Son. For despite the ontological asymmetry between God and what he has created, he "the creator has specifically chosen and designated a particular community of persons as the exclusive site for full divine disclosure in creation".[147] After establishing the church's place in the Trinitarian mystery, Balthasar argues against the agnostic temptation to get the church as a privileged context with exclusive accessibility to esoteric or hidden mysteries which are then encapsulated in bodies of dogmatic definitions for others to follow. Although he agrees that the divine glory is revealed and renewed within the ecclesial context, Balthasar allows for the role of the Holy Spirit whose presence in the church interprets the living Christ in the lives of the believers.[148]

According to Balthasar, there are two sacraments that guarantee the fruitfulness of the church in enacting and dispensing the divine mysteries. Firstly, in Baptism the individual enters into the Trinitarian life and then gets trained to be Christ-like. The individual is incorporated into the church and his new form is inseparable from the form of the church in the salvation history. Secondly, and in a more abundant manner, in the Eucharist the Trinitarian life is poured out into the world through the church. The Eucharist is doxological because in it there is mutual self-giving and glorification of the Trinitarian persons: The Son glorifying the Father by his obedient mission even to accepting death, death on a cross; and the Father and the Holy Spirit glorifying the Son by raising him from the dead. It is this supreme event that is crystallised into a form of a community meal. The Trinitarian life is condensed into a social event. On the one hand Balthasar affirms the conception of a church that is not detached as if it were in the other world of the supernatural and out of touch with the human realities. On the other, he insists that the enactment of the mysteries is not a social event because it is vertically entrusted to the Church by God himself. In other words, whereas the church as a social context is the custodian and dispenser of these mysteries, she can only be so because they are bestowed upon her.[149]

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[147] Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 114-115.
[148] Ibid., 115-116
[149] Ibid., 117.

From the foregoing discussions it can be deduced that Balthasar sees a network of relationships that is created by the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist: in Baptism, the baptised enters into the Trinitarian mystery and becomes a member of the church. In the same way, the Eucharist imprints on the recipient the Trinitarian life and builds him into the ecclesial community. These sacraments therefore create an unbroken triangular relationship, namely the I-You-We relationship. One is drawn into the Trinitarian life and at the same times incorporated into ecclesial life.[150]

6.3. THE CHURCH'S STRUGGLES IN A TROUBLED WORLD

Balthasar asserts that "the church comes from the cross and is always heading towards it".[151] His view of Christian history is that it is not one of peace and tranquil, but of turbulence and warfare because the triumph of Christ as the light has provoked resistance from the powers of darkness. The believer and the church incorporated into Christ and with the Holy Spirit of Christ – after the death, descent and resurrection of Christ – work toward destroying all forces of Satan and delivering a perfect kingdom to God the Father.[152] Consequently the trial and persecutions ought to be expected as a backlash or resistance from the powers of darkness against which the Christian and the church have to fight. Balthasar contends that with the power of the Holy Spirit, a gift from Christ her founder and head, the church is commissioned for discipleship, and at the centre of this life of witnessing is to "drink the Lord's cup".[153] From this conviction, Balthasar shares in the belief that the church is built on the blood of the martyrs in history as he says that "the mystery of the cross accompanies it from the beginning and throughout all the phases of its development".[154] In this perspective, an apostolic church therefore follows in the foot prints of its founder and head and the witness of the apostles who have handed it down through history.[155]

It is Balthasar's conviction that the church must accept suffering, for she cannot be any different from Christ her founder and head. He lucidly asks that if the church is not only passive fruit of Christ's redemptive act, "but the consort who helps him, must not something of Christ's mystery be repeated in her too?"[156] Balthasar believes that the daily life of the

[150] Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 117.
[151] Theo-drama IV, 431.
[152] Ibid., 427.
[153] Ibid., 427.
[154] Ibid., 448.
[155] Ibid., 449.
[156] Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions,* 63.

church in the world is carrying and bearing of the cross. In the face of the increasing sophistication of the world, the church is bound to suffer malevolence, opposition and aggression. The church is urged not to be afraid to take its responsibility in the midst of these assailing forces following the admonition of St. Paul to Corinthians in 1 Cor 4:10-13.[157] Ultimately, the counsel from Balthasar is that the church must accept to live within this challenging context and tolerate it, but without compromising or confusing their Christian infallible truth with the fragmentary truths presented and championed by the world. What however must be sought daily as the preoccupation of the church and the Christian is the will of God in all the apparently confusing situations that confront them. It is in this way that the church sets herself out into the world in active engagement with its forces. Moreover, it is in moving deeper into the world that the church's true nature comes to shine forth and her mission properly done.[158]

6.4. THE BASIS FOR THE REFORM OF THE CHURCH

One of the controversial aspects of Balthasar's theology is his position on the reform of the church. Before Vatican II he sounded the drum for the reform of the church. He decried how the church was closed in on itself and nostalgic about its past glories while the world moved on in different directions at a much faster pace. He called on the church to wake up from its slumbers to engage with worldly developments. After the council however, he abruptly changed his stance and called upon the church to retreat to its inner self because of the danger he saw in the way the council was received and interpreted. However, since our interest does not lie in evaluating Balthasar's view on these matters, we will here simply establish that Balthasar advocated for a kenotic church according to the pattern of the self-giving nature of God. As Margaret M. Turek in the foreword to "Engagement with God", has affirmed, Balthasar pleaded that the church "must follow Christ's path of 'descent' into the world and assume Christ's form of life".[159]

The assurance Balthasar gives is that the church does not need to fear for she has present within herself the Holy Spirit who continues to guide her. So, the church must be alert while at the same time relying on the workings of the Spirit to discern the will of God in all its members so as to give credible witness to Christ in the world. He urged the church to

[157] Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions,* 64.
[158] Ibid., 71-82.
[159] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, vii.

engage with her historical context as he convincingly insisted that "this deed will witness to Christ through a church that has interpreted, understood and responded to the signs of the times, above all by understanding how to move and to make use of herself and her own structures, like living limbs, in a new and different way".[160] Balthasar strongly believes in the active presence and working of the Holy Spirit in the church at all times, prompting members into the life of faith and love. He makes a plea to the church to be attentive to the working of the Holy Spirit in the church and in all its members so as to ensure the reliving of Christ's life: "it is only want of faith and want of love that can imprison Christians in their past; the Spirit has set them free for all time, drawing them into the future so that in every act they are forming and transforming the world, moving towards that unimaginable image which is present before them, not subjectively but objectively in all they do".[161]

The visible church with its administrators, Balthasar believes, has a duty to keep itself relevant in the ever-changing world. It is therefore required of it to be sensitive to the developments in the world, be attentive to the promptings of the Spirit from within its members, have concerns for its future and not be fixated on the glories of its past history. Balthasar thus uncompromisingly attacks the naiveté of the church of his time which he saw evidently in the lack of freshness of theological ideas and hermeneutics of teaching the faith. He exhorted the church to dare to break out of the confines of dogmatism as he emphatically posited: "to honour tradition does not excuse one from the obligation of beginning everything from the beginning each time, not with Augustine or Thomas or Newman, but with Christ".[162]

It should not however be supposed that Balthasar does call for a revolution or for dismantling of the structural citadels of powers of the church. Instead he advocated the reform of the church from within using its own intellectual and spiritual powers. Although he does not endorse movements that employ extreme force, he alludes to situations in which (ironically) violence ultimately serves a good purpose and from one perspective can be seen as the product of a "harsh grace".[163]

Notwithstanding the above, Balthasar's strong belief is that the option Christians have to reform the church is "transcendence from within"; the practice of the life of holiness which,

[160] Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions*, 37.
[161] Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way to Revelation*, 73.
[162] Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions*, 34.
[163] Ibid., 23.

while able to be fought or resisted, cannot be refuted. Balthasar contends that this indeed is the unique gift that the church can offer to the world. He makes a distinction between holiness that is latent in the lives of the baptised and the 'canonical holiness', that is holiness as it is institutionally acknowledged and defined. As he warns against the tendency of the church to privilege canonical holiness over and against the holiness of its members which is a manifestation of the continuous working of the Holy Spirit in the church, Balthasar also notes that the Holy Spirit does not prompt the baptised to thought or action contrary to the living faith of the church in history.[164] Moreover, Balthasar maintains, the fresh breath that the Spirit breathes into the mystical body through the members will always be faithful to the one Christian truth. The call to discern the happenings in the world and seize the opportunity to witness does not in any measure mean to relativize the Christian truth but one which has an internal strength enabling it to address changing circumstances and to make new relationships in different historical contexts of the church.[165] Balthasar argues that there is only one infallible truth so that if the demand made on a Christian to bring newness to the church, is inspired by the Holy Spirit, it will not contradict the known and professed truth in the historical life of the church.[166]

7. THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION AND MISSION

7.1. THE MARK OF THE REDEEMED

Balthasar contends that those who are redeemed by Christ have experienced a transformation in their being – they live for love of God. And drawing from Rom 5:8,10, he upholds the belief that this redemptive action of Christ is located in the eternal plan of God and in fact had already taken place prior to Jesus' death 'for us' sinners. Consequently, we then live for the Lord because we have died with Christ.[167] Furthermore, Balthasar asserts that in a special way, in the Eucharistic celebration, this transformation is more robust because through it, the priest in *persona Christi* configures and consecrates all others into the mystery of Godhead since the economic Trinity is appropriated by the immanent Trinity.[168] One can see here the conviction that the encounter of a person with Christ does not leave one in a fixed position.

[164] Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions*, 26
[165] Ibid., 47.
[166] Ibid., 79-80.
[167] Theo-drama IV, 389-390.
[168] Ibid., 393.

With faith in Christ's drama and the sacraments particularly the Eucharist, the members of the church are prompted into action by the Holy Spirit to continue Christ's work in the world. And Balthasar thinks that the carrying out of this mission is not a matter of only repeating what has been done, but as a matter of fact, a Christian is called to be innovative, with the aid of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, taking seriously the contextual situation in which he finds himself.[169]

It can be argued that Balthasar's understanding of human existence is illuminated by his deep reflection on the life of Christ because he believes that in him we see what we should be in relation to God our creator. Thus, our progress of the personhood ought to be built on the form of Christ. Following the figure of Christ, we are drawn into the Trinitarian life since the distance between us and the Trinitarian mystery has been bridged with the incarnation. The Christian then enters into the spheres of God's love and freedom and participates in the Theo-drama on the world stage not because he is compelled to, but out of love for God, for one another and for the world.[170]

Because Balthasar has faith in this relationship between the Christian and his God, he argues that even if one's nature is damaged by sin, he still has a vocation to participate in God. The gift of grace offered by God in the intra-penetration of the creature does not alienate man from self, but it is actually the means by which he finds his true self.[171] However, this interconnectedness does not mean fusion of the divine and human. Instead, it is in it that the freedom of the creature is firmly grounded. A freedom in which, nonetheless, the liberated person can say no to God's offer of friendship and salvation.[172]

7.2. THE GIVENNESS OF THE CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

Balthasar looks at freedom at two levels: first, a person's freedom in relation to other human beings and the surrounding world; and second, one's fundamental relationship to the absolute being (God). Since our interest lies in the latter, we will devote more of our attention to the relationship of the Christian's freedom in relation to divine freedom.

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[169] Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth: A Guide Through Balthasar's Dramatics*, 53.
[170] Mark A. McIntosh, "Christology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 34-35.
[171] Theo-drama IV, 382.
[172] Ibi., 383.

Because the Christian life is grounded in God, his (finite) being has freedom "over neither its own ground not its own fulfilment"[173] As observed by Ben Quash, freedom in the realm of the human, in Balthasar's conception is "witness to God's prior initiative in making such freedom possible".[174] Taking stock of Balthasar's emphasis on creature's obedience in relation to God, Fout remarks that, "for von Balthasar the life of the Christian is ultimately one of obedience rather than freedom. Nevertheless, it is clear from what has been said up to this point that von Balthasar intends to present this obedience as consistent with joy, motivated by love, and leading to the creatures' embrace of her true personhood and vocation".[175] To talk of human freedom then is not possible without ordering it in obedience to the divine initiative. Positive freedom according to Balthasar is only enacted in obedience and self-surrender to the gift of love that has been revealed. A Christian must look outside self for realisation of his freedom and his destiny. That being said, the creature's relationship to the creator (by which Balthasar means the Trinitarian God who is present in the church) is therefore intrinsic to its nature. His "autonomy occurs always and everywhere from within a dynamic relation to God in Christ".[176] In asserting this position, Balthasar does not however obliterate the immeasurable dissimilarity that exists between God and the human person, but instead affirms them in their proper natures- divine and human. They remain "genuinely distinct, but only from within their intrinsic relation – union – with one another".[177]

In Balthasar's view, consciousness then can be defined as the being's awareness of its "indebtedness to a source outside itself".[178] It therefore is only an image of a source outside itself, and its goal is also outside itself. Consequently, its call is to transcend itself towards its source. And when the consciousness focuses on itself, it is imprisoned in subjectivity and needs to be liberated so that it can tend towards its true source.[179] Balthasar however argues that this movement of the finite consciousness towards its source is not the working out of the human person. Rather the knowledge of his true being and the truth of the absolute towards which he tends is gained through God's self-disclosure.[180]

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[173] Theo-drama IV, 139.
[174] Ben Quash, "The Theo-drama," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 147.
[175] Fout, *Fully Alive*, 130.
[176] Nicholas Healy and David L. Schindler, "For the Life of the World: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Church as Eucharist," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 60.
[177] Ibid., 61.
[178] Theo-drama IV, 139.
[179] Ibid., 141.
[180] Ibid., 142.

While giving due regard to the working of the absolute in the finite, Balthasar cautions that care must be taken that the individual's freedom is not suppressed and subsumed in the absolute freedom. This mistake would mean shifting personal responsibility for actions of the individual human persons and giving them over to the absolute. All that would count as legitimate would be what is of divine initiative and not of human initiative. Having closely examined Balthasar's dynamic interplay of creature-divine freedom, Fout, while commending Balthasar for the role he assigns to human freedom, nonetheless argues that Balthasar's stress on the divine action excludes human agency. In this regard Fout asserts that "the structure of von Balthasar's account, in the final analysis, reflects a straight-line obedience: either the creature freely and joyfully submits, emptying her own agency and doing precisely what is given, or else she is disobedient".[181] Nonetheless, Balthasar's fear is that when creatures attempt to find their happiness and fulfilment from within themselves, the result is often tragic: violence, fanaticism and anarchism because of the negation of the truth of creature's indebtedness to an extrinsic source.[182] Therefore, in his view, the human person can attain fullness of what he is created to be only by way of obedience to God.[183] Drawing on Maximus the Confessor's distinction between creature's essence and its mode of existence, Balthasar is keen to highlight the gratuitous giftedness that lies behind the nature of the creature. And conscious of the fact that nature owes its existence to the Other, it will respond in its finite freedom to the invitation of absolute freedom.[184] Nonetheless, rather than overriding human freedom, absolute freedom accompanies creaturely freedom to God's plan for it while the creature on his or her part is expected to give humble acceptance of one's mission on the pattern of Christ and the saints' lived examples of faithful living of the exercise of creaturely freedom. And once the creature submits himself or herself to God's mission, there can be no tension but harmonious relationship between the finite and supernatural freedoms respectively.

Christian freedom is then realised only in the embrace of the divine revelation which then invites it into the realm of the absolute freedom. This divine revelation is made manifest in the life of Jesus Christ.[185] Consequently, what gives an individual a special quality is something that is given to him; the gift of grace which he receives and makes his own.

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[181] Fout, *Fully Alive*, 136.
[182] Theo-drama, IV, 144.
[183] Mark A. McIntosh, "Christology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 26.
[184] Ibid., 31.
[185] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 6.

In regards to the relationship of the Christian's freedom to other human beings and the world with which one is surrounded, Aidan has argued that for Balthasar, awareness of the fact of my existence is mutually tied to the consciousness of the existence of the others sharing in being. The awareness of my being comes simultaneously with the awareness that being is possessed by innumerable others. However, this is not to say that I am a unique individual with other individuals existing with me, but rather that I am unique only by making room for other individuals. It is only in this kind of understanding of our uniqueness that we mirror the Trinity because we not only acknowledge our shared nature but we promote and enhance it not only in us but in others as well. We let others be as they are; while acknowledging the goodness in them, we love what is in them.[186] A further aspect of human freedom at this level is the freedom of the will to choose or decide to or otherwise. According to Balthasar, this type of freedom should not be defended for its own sake. It must always be treated in reference to the divine freedom for it functions in the expanse of divine providence. For outside God, man's attempt to make meaning of life, to attempt to construct whole of it, is pathetic because all can only be fragmentary. Thus, on the human horizon, wholeness comes in only with the incarnation.[187]

7.3. THE INTERPLAY OF DIVINE AND HUMAN POWERS

Balthasar is of the view that true freedom must be seen as self-giving. But he laments that the opposite seems to be the case precisely because of our understanding of God in terms of power or omnipotence. Aware that the human person is being controlled by this power, one asserts his or her autonomy against that which stands out against his or her flourishing. In this struggle, the human person seeks to extricate self from the grasp of a powerful or force that attempts to control or weigh him or her down.[188] Therefore, the power at the heart of the dynamics of interplay between the finite and infinite freedom can either taken positively or negatively. Against this background, Balthasar argues that since power is an expression of the freedom of the human person, so it is intrinsically related to freedom. In a way then, it is a positive aspect of decision making – as long as creaturely freedom transcends itself to embrace the absolute. On the flip side however, evil also maybe associated with power when

[186] Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth: A Guide Through Balthasar's Dramatics*, 67.
[187] Ibid., 145.
[188] Theo-drama IV, 146-148.

it diverts freedom from its path to the absolute and instead focuses on itself and the preoccupation of the world without reference to the absolute.[189]

Furthermore, according to Balthasar, man's freedom resides in his dignity as a being created in God's image and likeness. Therefore, the power that he evokes, while inviolable, is inseparable from the absolute and its norm of the good, because it is a basic element in those forces which have selfless giving at the apex.[190] After establishing the inherent inseparability of power from goodness, Balthasar warns that any attempt to set the self above the standard of (absolute) goodness will subjugate goodness to an individual's power, with the consequence that one decides from his own power what thing to do and the bad to avoid. And once one is driven by only his own power, he usurps the power of the absolute and the measure of goodness and makes his ego prevail as the measure of all things. The resultant exercise of power of such an individual will cause nothing but harm to the other whose presence is perceived by the ego as a rivalry to the self's existence.

Because of this situation, Balthasar's conviction is that man must always move between the two poles: although he exists in himself, he also must allow room for the other and thus allowing a desire for the other. This yearning is an expression of the gift of our nature rooted in God who is the first to offer us love. In this perspective, it can be affirmed that the creature's craving for God who has freely given himself to us is not a demand. Instead, it can only be seen as a free response to God's offer".[191] Therefore, the creature cannot be conceived outside God because "God is completely immanent in his complete transcendence."[192] The intimacy between the creature and God is therefore beyond exhaustive expression.

In his own power, man cannot find from within himself answers to the ultimate meaning of his life. It lies beyond him for "God reserves to himself the right to meet man in his searching and to satisfy his questing whenever and in whatever way he chooses".[193] Playing at the background of this assertion is Balthasar's rejection of the concept of pure nature by which one is able to attain satisfaction in this world rendering the turn to the supernatural as only secondarily. And as a consequence of this way of thinking, the incarnation and the cross would be regarded as merely additional means and therefore not indispensable.

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[189] Theo-drama IV, 148-149.
[190] Ibid., 151.
[191] Ibid., 372.
[192] Ibid., 373
[193] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 68.

7.4. THE CHRISTIAN CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP: SELF-SACRIFICE AS THE WAY OF CHRIST

After establishing that the redeemed are ontologically transformed into Christ, Balthasar argues that Christian life is not simply symbolically lived out, but more importantly, it is sacrificial. This sacrifice however is not firstly a property of a Christian, but of Christ and, the former's value is gained only because it is related to the latter. The redeemed then insert themselves in faith into this drama that Jesus suffered and died for us while we were still sinners.[194] A true Christian life must then entail an offering of oneself vicariously according to the pattern of Christ because this is the knowledge we have of Christ and on which our faith is established. According to Balthasar, "faith here means my response to the love that has sacrificed itself for me".[195] This undoubtedly calls on Christians to expose themselves to undeserving bruises, scandals and contradictions for it is precisely here that authentic love that shares in the divine love begins. Only in this way will Christians share in the incomprehensible love of Christ who though sinless was burdened with the sins of us all. The call Balthasar therefore makes is that our discipleship must be daring in its selflessness as we move out to refresh and enrich the lives of all with the gift of Christ's life that we have received and radiate. Balthasar cautions that these acts of ours are not borne from our own human capabilities: they are a result of our being conformed to Christ in worship and thanksgiving for the love with which he has loved us first.[196] As has been rightly observed by Jason A. Fout, according to Balthasar, once we have impressed on ourselves the kenotic life of Christ, what flows from our lives is an ethical imperative: "with Balthasar, the glory of the Lord expressed chiefly in the sacrificial self-giving love of Christ in his mission, explicitly begets a responding, self-giving love of the creature, in a specifically Marian form".[197]

Citing the life of Jesus Christ himself and that of his followers like Peter and Paul, Balthasar is convinced that "a Christian's historical path may well lead to the cross" although death is not the end, for "the Christian is in principle someone who has risen and ascended into heaven" and therefore "he is both crucified with the Lord and risen with him".[198] Continuing on this line, a believer must be one who shares Christ's weakness, dies with him so that he may reign with him. Balthasar however makes a distinction between these events

[194] Theo-drama IV, 195.
[195] Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way to Revelation*, 82.
[196] Ibid., 89.
[197] Fout, *Fully Alive*, 111-113.
[198] Theo-drama IV, 386.

in Jesus and his followers: although the two (dying and rising) do not happen in consecutive phases in the case of Jesus Christ, in human beings the rising must always be expected in the eschaton, meanwhile being assured of "the unity and integrity of the Spirit of Christ, simultaneously bearing death and resurrection within us".[199] Christian discipleship is therefore a call to participate in the life of Christ who has been offered to us as a gift, not only in the resurrection, but also – and in fact the first in order of precedence of phases – in his death. For we are crucified with Christ so we can share his resurrection.[200]

According to Balthasar, following along the path of Christ is inseparable from suffering, rejection and alienation. For indeed, if a Christian is called to mould his life according to the pattern of Christ's life – which has both a horizontal dimension (from birth to the cross) and a vertical dimension (his descent into hell), he must be ready to embrace not only the physical and observable trials of life during the sojourn, but also the abyss of darkness, where all estimation of time and opportunities escape us, just as it did to Jesus before us. Therefore, we must then be ready to "live within a horizontal dimension and from sources that lie beyond the limits of our mortality".[201] However, this does not mean that the individual's human nature (with its limitation) is obliterated so that one becomes divine. Rather, the grace of God is only capable of enabling the person to stretch his capabilities to a humanly unimaginable limit. This situation Balthasar speaks of thus:

> When a man says yes to God, it is possible that God has destined him to suffering, darkness, and dereliction, a prospect sufficient to strike terror into the hearts of finite and mortal beings, and to cause them to draw back in fright because this is far more than ordinary man can demand of himself, even when stretched to the limit.[202]

In this regard, Balthasar makes a distinction between letting God have his way through us, by means of his compelling love on the one hand, and resigning ourselves to some superior authority to determine our fateful end on the other. He admits that in the Christian vocation and life there are bound to arise conflicts of the wills – divine and human – but it is divine will that resides within divine love (with which God loved us first) that overcomes all. As a

[199] Theo-drama IV, 385.
[200] Ibid., 387.
[201] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 37.
[202] Ibid., 38.

matter of fact, Balthasar asserts, it is love that endures in the soul even in moments of darkness and apparent absence of God; and this love is more compelling than any exercise of power.[203] Nevertheless, Balthasar concedes that although man has the capacity to transcend the limits of the structures of his society and psychological bounds, it is deceptive to think that one can be totally free from human limitation in loving. And not even the attempt to do so by seeking mystical experience. However, he also sees the possibility only by immersing ourselves and making our own "that same attitude of mind that Jesus had, and with which Jesus, as God's action has permeated his whole existence".[204]

The foregoing thematic discussion of Balthasar's theology has established that kenosis permeates his theological vision of the Trinity, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, Christian vocation and mission. The kenotic ideas discussed here will be further crystallised and then critiqued in an interactive discussion with Ela's liberative insights in the next chapter before they can finally be employed as the basis for African liberation theology in the fifth chapter.

CONCLUSION

The chapter starts by presenting Balthasar as a product of his own time. It situated him as an engaging and attentive subject to the German culture and modern literary movements. He embraced the values of his western European culture and traditions and wrote extensively, engaging with issues of his time. Balthasar developed a critical stance towards modern culture and was particularly critical of the novelty of modernity, challenging his church and its theology to renew its approach to the world or else lose touch with reality and become irrelevant. At the heart of his call for renewal is the beauty and goodness of God in Christ that the church has the mission to give to the world. For the church to be capable of offering light and taste to the world, Balthasar suggests, there is need to move away from Thomistic or neo-Thomistic theology, and thus his theo-dramatic and aesthetical theology is a dynamic way of speaking about God and his relationship with us and the world. Both the theo-drama and theological aesthetics are built on a Christocentric view of salvation. The thrust of his indictment of modernity is the claim to see everything within *a priori* explanatory frameworks that gives no room for God's action in the world. According to Balthasar, this is false hope because the human person can only find ultimate fulfilment in Christ. He therefore

[203] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 44-45.
[204] Ibid., 80.

cautions against the danger of reductionism manifested in the human person's claim to find salvation from within self and history. Balthasar instead puts Christ at the centre of history to its eschatological fulfilment. He argues that in Christ, God has initiated God's drama within man's history, and he is both transcendent and immanent. The Christological principle determines and permeates Balthasar's understanding of God's inner life, his relationship to the human person and the world, his ecclesiology and Christian vocation and mission.

I have established that kenotic motif is not only pervasive in the oeuvre of Balthasar's corpus, but it constitutes the thrust of his theological vision. Balthasar posits that God in his loving and selfless giving, has revealed himself as a kenotic God. And because it is in the very nature of God to be kenotic, it is therefore the normative rule for the church and Christian living. The call to a life of participation in God constitutes the demand for self-expropriation and sacrifice for the other. However, it has been observed that although these insights, from the outset, do not appear to bolster the movement for the desired social transformation in Africa, they nonetheless will offer a constructive critique for African liberation theology's approach, content and concerns. Considering his unique approach to theology, his indictment of the church to which he belonged, the courage to stand alone against the established trends and systems, I have argued that Balthasar stands out an inspirational figure for African liberation theologians whose reflections on specific African reality could be faced with suspicion and bias by traditional theology and the church authorities in the name of being custodians of the faith and morals. In the next chapter I will create a ground for an interactive critique between the kenosis of Balthasar and African liberation theology as enunciated in the works of Jean-Marc Ela.

CHAPTER FOUR

BALTHASAR'S KENOSIS AND AFRICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY: AN INTERACTIVE EXCHANGE

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I set up a critical interaction between Balthasar's kenotic theology and African liberation theology. From the outset, it could appear that the attempt to create a conversation between the two would prove to be an unproductive endeavour. However, in what follows I will argue that such a conversation is not only possible but can be fruitful for the understanding and the practice of the Christian faith in the African context. The discussion of these substantial subjects will focus primarily on the thought of two key theologians from two different cultures: Hans Urs von Balthasar's kenotic theology in a European context and Jean-Marc Ela's liberation theology in an African context.

The constructed dialogue between the two will bring to the fore specific kenotic-liberative ideas of Balthasar's theology that could buttress African liberation theology, which I take as the most pertinent theology for the African continent. At the background of the arguments in this chapter is on the one hand, a criticism towards the current trends in African liberation theology, and on the other hand, the tendency to think that (Balthasar's) kenotic category debilitate liberation theology's vigour. It is my conviction that a kenotic motif, particularly that of Balthasar can reinforce African liberation theology against the suspicion, criticism and opposition that have been advanced against liberation theology. The preference for Balthasar's kenotic theology does not in any way suggest that Balthasar's theology is flawless. The preferential appeal I make to his kenotic theology is limited to general structural social and political dimensions in which an African Christian lives and witnesses to his faith. That being said, it does not mean that other detailed concerns of the individual person and the intra-layers of society are not of importance to me as a person or to the aim of this dissertation. Balthasar's theology will not be employed uncritically as a ready-made solution for African liberation theology's problems. Moreover, this interactive dialogue is not a simple mutuality between kenosis and liberation because in addition to exposing the inadequacy within African liberation theology, it will raise ramifications in the ongoing debate and reception of Balthasar's theology. That means the interface dialogue, without

revealing a substantial degree of reciprocity between the two, will suggest a positive evaluation of the relevance of Balthasar's theology to African liberation theology, while raising certain questions about the adequacy of the latter.

I will proceed by recapitulating earlier considerations. Then, I will examine the theological concerns of Balthasar with liberation theology and point out areas of convergence or compatibility of Balthasar's theology with African liberation theology. Finally, while teasing out pervasive themes in Balthasar's works, I will carefully bridge the gaps between the two and point out areas of their irreconcilable difference.

1. SETTING THE STAGE: A RECAPITULATION OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND KENOSIS

1.1. AFRICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

As already seen, the theology of liberation is diverse and has received varying emphases in the different contexts from which it has arisen. However, what is commonly agreed upon is that liberation theology is built upon the two pillars of the preferential option for the poor and the primacy of praxis over theory. African liberation theology fuses these leitmotifs into one theological concern, namely, African human life and dignity. This has been the goal of African theology in both its inculturation and liberation strands. As discussed in the first chapter, African theology chose the prevailing situations as its starting point. Accepting inculturation as a basic premise, it argued that there could be no justification for abstracting the African from his consciousness and identity. Accordingly, it sought to establish significant areas of continuation between the traditional African heritage and the Christian faith. In the same way, African liberation theology advanced the argument that the gospel ought to address itself to the African person in his present and daily realities. The interpretative force of African theology consists in the interaction of the gospel with the African person in the contingencies of his socio-political milieu and context. If the gospel has to communicate hope, it must address the forces that keep the African person in bondage to misery and suffering. Consequently, it is incumbent on the church and the theologian to have a preferential option for the poor and disadvantaged by allowing the full potential of the gospel to interact and have a stake in their realities.

Understood this way, theology is far from being an instrument at the service of the church in the sense of following some fixed principle but rather by, and more importantly, calling the church to constant conversion to the path of Christ by being attentive to the lived experiences of the people as *locus salvificus*. For how can we meaningfully speak of God in abstract terms far detached from the concerns of the people who are marginalised by societal organization or who live in the shadow of death from starvation and diseases that could otherwise be treated? As God does not reveal himself in a vacuum, he enters into the real human being's conditions and from there addresses him or her.

At least within the scope of this study, the concerns that African liberation theology addresses, have been well expressed by Jean-Marc Ela as follows:

> How is the church to be the church of Christ in those countries where bloody tyrants celebrate countless murders, exterminating harmless, voiceless population? How is the church to enter into solidarity with the lowliest, the most disinherited, following in the footsteps of Christ himself, who died on the cross to testify to his love for human beings, his sisters and brothers? In a situation in which any citizen can be thrown in jail at any moment and tortured for a casual reflection or opinion, how can the church avoid being confused with those who are accomplices in the injustice afflicting the unarmed masses of the rural regions and urban slums of Africa? In a word: At a moment when the privileged of the system are stifling their consciences to protect their situation, who will dare to confront the forces of oppression that condemn men, women, and children to suffer atrocious living conditions and all but starve in prison?[1]

The above excerpt is important, not only because it is a precis of African situations and sets programmatically the task of African theology, but more important, it outlines the scope of concerns of African liberation theology. Nevertheless, the general nature of the issues raised gives some support to the criticism that has been advanced against liberation theology, namely that, at least at the beginning, it did not take seriously the concerns of other minorities groups in the church and the wider society. Specifically, it has been said of Jean-Marc Ela that "as a male theologian, he did not dwell on some issues that are important to women."[2]

[1] AC, 7.
[2] David T. Ngong, "The Theologian as Missionary: The Legacy of Jean-Marc Ela," *Journal of theology for Southern Africa* 136 (March 2010), 9.

There are a range of intra-African injustices, marginalisation and oppression of some groups of people that African liberation theologians failed to take on board. For example, the marginalisation and subjugation of women, and other minority groups. Without minimizing the particular concerns of these critical voices, I will limit my consideration of African liberation theology in large to Jean Marc Ela's theology. This however does not mean that I do not believe in the significance and urgency of those other liberation voices. In fact, as I proceed, I will bring them along and integrate or at least indicate my awareness of them in the discussions that will ensue.

Ela's theology does not only present the liberative thrust, but also, and more importantly, his theology is kenotically oriented. Admittedly, Ela is credited with being "one of the earliest theologians to call for a new paradigm of mission which is not linked to the interest of the strong and powerful but rather is directed toward those who are marginalised: mission done in weakness and vulnerability."[3] Because of this vision, Ela argues that African theology should hold together both inculturation and liberation theologies. While the former restores the African people's dignity and consciousness as a people with heritage, the latter addresses the deplorable conditions of the African people. However, Ela argues that the theology of inculturation has outlived its usefulness in the post-independent nation states, and accordingly our main consideration will be the real existential situation of the African person.

1.2. BALTHASAR'S KENOTIC THEOLOGY

A proposition I have earlier presented is that inter-relationships between kenotic theology and African liberation theology are potentially beneficial. It is important to examine this affirmation with reference to the thinking of Balthasar, widely regarded as one of the leading catholic theologians of the twentieth century.

Two key concepts in Balthasar's theology are beauty and drama. First, with regard to beauty, Balthasar avows that the Christian revelation's form is beautiful because it is love, that reaches its climax with the saving passion and death of Jesus Christ on the cross. This beauty is not sensual and therefore not only an object of the eyes, but it is directed to the heart and mind from where it takes root in the recipient. The beauty of the cross has no symmetry, but it has an inherent beauty that breaks forth to penetrate and transform all. The uniqueness of this beauty also lies in its being consistent with truth and goodness. This

[3] David T. Ngong, "The Theologian as Missionary: The Legacy of Jean-Marc Ela," 11.

beauty breaks boundaries and irresistibly moves a person into action on the world stage – thus the second pillar: drama. In the Theo-drama, there is the inter-dependence of the author, the actor and the guide of the piece of drama. Inherent in the drama is not only inter-dependence but the self-giving in trust of one to the other person. Balthasar believes that in the theo-dramatics, justice is given to "concrete Christian existence in its personal, and political dimensions,"[4] and creates an interaction between the divine being and the human persons in their contingent human conditions. Thus, at the heart of Balthasar's aesthetic and theo-dramatic projects is the sense of self-limitation, mutual exchanges, and ultimately the human yielding to God for the service of kingdom of God in the dynamics of the present and the hereafter.

1.3. BALTHASAR: A LIBERATION THEOLOGIAN?

For most readers and experts on Balthasar, it would be strange or even a joke to answer the above question in the affirmative. There is no doubt that his theology is heavily aesthetic, poetic and has little if anything, to do with 'praxis' and 'option of the poor' which are the principal pillars of liberation theology. Moreover, writing with the background of membership of an aristocratic family in an affluent part of Western Europe, and having immersed himself in its culture by undertaking the history of the foundation of western culture and civilization, one would not expect Balthasar to articulate the principles of liberation theology per se. As expected, Balthasar speaks about God in the language and symbolism familiar to him and to his context, thus it forms the poetic and aesthetic embroidery of his theology. Balthasar's theology has also received from a wide range of scholars and theologians' comments on his views on the question of gender. I will not attempt to delve into this question in any detail because doing so will entail a digression from the direction and focus of this research. All in all, to the feminist critics of Balthasar, it is difficult to acknowledge that Balthasar could offer some constructive answer to the liberation theology while his views on gender, according to the critics, legitimize subordination of women to men's domination.[5]

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[4] Theo-Drama I, 119.

[5] Jennifer Newsome Martin traces the source of Balthasar's theology of kenosis to other theological traditions so as to retrieve from it some constructive implications such as the goodness of created bodies and their relationships, or the value of specific kind of suffering. Nonetheless, she observes that "despite Balthasar's assertion that there is no question of inequality with respect to sexual difference, it is de facto true that in Balthasar's theology woman is put into some hierarchical relation of inclusion and derivation in respect to man, and ontological priority is accorded to the masculine. His pervasive use of gendered or nuptial symbolism, in

Balthasar does not have a sincere engagement with liberation theology, nor does he attempt to decipher the different types of liberation theology. He does not engage in dialogue the distinctive thinking of different liberation theologians as he does with other theologians and literary figures.[6] What stands out from Balthasar's various references to liberation theology is his fear of what he sees as the tendency to anthropological reductionism. He sees that theology as a movement built on the material needs of the human person and thus risks collapsing the eschatological horizon into the material questions and accordingly succumb to materialistic vision of salvation.

Nonetheless, the argument I will make is that a closer study of Balthasar's theology, and particularly taking seriously his theo-dramatic theory, will show such a richness of

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which the feminine (although not necessarily or in every case the female) is identified with being and receptivity, and the masculine (though not necessarily or in every case the male) with representation and activity can problematically delineate roles that belong essentially to women or to men." Jennifer Newsome Martin, "The 'Whence' and the "whither" of Balthasar's Gendered Theology: Rehabilitating Kenosis for the Feminist Theology," *Modern Theology* 31, no.2 (April 2015), 211. In a similar way, Karen Kilby argues that although Balthasar's characterisation of women in his theology is not negative, and takes gender difference seriously while at the same time insisting on their complementarity, she accuses him of ambiguity and double standard to the detriment of women liberation, and he attributes activity to male and receptivity to female. She goes further to pin point that according to him, "to be male is to be strong, to take initiative, to be active and goal-oriented; to be woman is to be open, receptive, surrendering, passive, to be characterised by weakness and dependence, to be contemplative." Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge: W. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 129. According to Elizabeth T. Vasko, Balthasar's nuptial symbolism, whereby God is spoken of as the bridegroom while creation as the bride, with the latter finding fulfilment only in obedience and receptivity to the former leads to the females' subordination to the male's authority. Although Balthasar's argues for complementarity of the sexes, his prevalent nuptial symbolism of binary of sexes overshadows and undermines the grounds for their reciprocal exchanges. For it is God (male) who takes initiative while creation (female) obediently responds to it. Vasko then concludes that Balthasar's "feminine receptivity to masculine initiative becomes a highly sexualised and erotic affair, which at times intimates the reality of marital rape." Elizabeth T. Vasko, "The Difference Gender Makes: Nuptiality, Analogy, and the Limits of Appropriating Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology in the Context of Sexual Violence," *The Journal of Religion* 95, no. 4 (October 2014), 504. Vasko further insists that although Balthasar's nuptial language is metaphorical, "it creates a framework that too easily allows for the theological justification of violence against women." Vasko, "The Difference Gender Makes," 507. Another critic of Balthasar's theology is Tina Beattie who accuses him of introducing into Catholic theology the concept of nuptial ecclesiology by which he defends the masculinity of the sacramental priesthood: "Von Balthasar distinguishes between the Petrine church which is masculine, and the Marian church which is feminine. The Petrine church is the institutional church governed by the male hierarchy, and the Marian church is the devotional, praying church, the Virgin Bride of Christ, which incorporates both males and females in the feminine role." Tina Beattie, "The Baptism of Eros," *Theology and Sexuality* 9, no. 2 (2003), 171 https://www-tandfonline-com.kuleuven.ezproxy.kuleuven.be/doi/pdf/10.1177/135583580200900115?needAccess=true [accessed July 18 2018].

[6] Balthasar's weakness not to engage with liberation theology has been expressed comprehensively by Todd Walatka: "Balthasar clearly acknowledges dangers in Origen's theological explorations, and Balthasar did much to rehabilitate Origen's work in the twentieth century; Balthasar sees deep ambiguity in Meister Eckhart's daring theological and mystical works, and yet finds in Eckhart and the wider Rheinland mystical tradition a compelling theological vision; Balthasar diagnoses clear Gnostic tendencies in the works of important modern Russian Orthodox thinkers, but he still finds deep, rich, and illuminating insights for Trinitarian theology and more," but he fails to have any serious engagement with the theological thought of a liberation theologian. Todd Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theo-dramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 64-65.

liberation theology's recurring ideas. These enriching themes which we posit would ground an authentic liberation theology, tend to crystallise around the kenotic motif that permeates the entirety of his theology. These we shall consider later in the main part of this chapter. However, before we go further into finding these fruitful areas in his theology for liberation theology for the African context, we will first consider his concerns and reservations about liberation theology in general.

2. BALTHASAR'S APPRAISAL OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND COUNTER CONTESTATION

2.1. BETWEEN UNAUNTHENTIC AND AUTHENTIC THEOLOGY

Balthasar's expressed views on liberation theology are characterised by ambivalence and suspicion. In his misgivings of liberation theology, he nonetheless considers it legitimate because "it has its specific place in a theology of the kingdom of God"[7] and because it rightly springs from certain interpretation and reception of the Vatican II. He raised issues about the way Vatican II was being received and interpreted, and thus how it has been responsible for the rise of the theologies of liberation. According to Balthasar, although liberation theology draws its origin and inspiration from Vatican II, particularly the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church," *Gaudium et spes*, he courageously underlines, what he considers the shallowness or oversight of the way it interprets the realities it addresses. It is apparently clear from Balthasar's dissatisfaction that from an erroneous interpretation results a faulty or unauthentic theology. Balthasar criticises the unscrutinised optimism (in Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes* and consequently in liberation theology) that too easily seeks to establish an intersection between the "church's catholic ideal" and the world culture without making a considerable reference to the "combat at the social level, at the level of culture and politics, where the battle is bound to be even more severe, since per se, the world-immanent social structures do not transcend this world."[8] Balthasar therefore places on the church the responsibility not only to scrutinise but to judge various world movements and developments, and to transform

[7] Balthasar, "Liberation Theology in the Light of Salvation History," in *Liberation Theology in Latin America: with selected essays and documents*, ed. James V. Schall, trans. Erasmo Leiva (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 46.
[8] Theo-drama IV, 481.

them by subjecting them to God's transforming fire. It is precisely in the strong belief in the transforming power of the gospel that Balthasar's critique of liberation theologies resides.

Without passing judgement immediately on Balthasar (in order not to fall into the same pitfalls as Balthasar himself), it is noteworthy to point out that Balthasar makes a sweeping condemnation without closer study of the tenets of the theologies of liberation and the nuances and emphases placed on them by different liberation theologians. However, a sincere liberation theology's sympathiser should not overlook Balthasar's main reservation that liberation theology falls into the danger of the tendency to "link together the relationship of the first and the second Adam, of earthly action and the kingdom that comes down from God, within a single system or overview."[9] According to Balthasar, this danger consists in conflating the divine with the human, the heavenly with the earthly thus resulting in a monistic view of reality since the message of salvation "cannot be brought into a wholly univocal relationship with the structuring of the world's future within time".[10]

Conversely, Balthasar also does not advocate a dualistic approach where the material concerns would be addressed without reference to the spiritual dimension of the person. Balthasar thinks "this would also make the church (as a separate *societas perfecta*) and its mission to the world appear to be something aloof from mankind's own mission to the world, and this would contradict God's becoming human".[11] After ruling out these options, Balthasar asserts that the message of the gospel is about the kingdom of God which is first and foremost "eschatological insofar as it is founded, in the end, on Jesus' death and resurrection and can only be indirectly reflected in the inner-wordily events of history."[12] Balthasar thus insinuates that liberation theology does not take seriously the eschatological content of the message of the gospel and instead dwells on liberation within the horizon of human history. It is precisely on this account that he finds Marxism very troubling, a matter on which we shall not go into details. Balthasar considers the employment of Marxist's analysis of history dangerous and cautions against its poisonous venom in Christian theology.[13]

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[9] Theo-drama IV, 482.
[10] Balthasar, "Liberation Theology in the Light of Salvation History," 142.
[11] Ibid., 142.
[12] Ibid.,142.
[13] Balthasar finds Marxism troubling. Its philosophy of materialism is a subtle retrieval of both the Old Testament and New Testament Hope, but "takes this fundamental concern out of its overall biblical context and places it in a framework of a purely horizontal theory of history." Kevin, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 145. Balthasar further points that Marxism secularises the biblical hope and turns it on its head to

It is important at this juncture to mention that Balthasar's theology is a reactionary testimony of his own time of post-war secularised Europe, and so he warns against the dangers of bending the church to the developments in the world that he saw as threatening to debilitate and subdue the gospel. According to Balthasar, Marxism poses the greatest threat to the Christian faith and he considers it the most infectious to the Christian faith. He observes that Marxist's materialist philosophy is a subtle retrieval of the Old Testament and the New Testament's concern of God's salvation, but it "takes this fundamental concern out of its overall biblical context and places it in a framework of a purely horizontal theory of history."[14] Marx thereby secularises the Old Testament messianic hope and turns the eschatological hope on its head while positing worldly economic and political justice. The Christian understanding of heaven is at risk of being reduced to the future within the historical progress. Balthasar further sees that at this juncture, Marxist atheism shows itself as the doxological relationship between the divine transcendence and human affairs while redemption is blotted out and God is consequently eliminated in human consciousness. A pathway is therefore open to humanism whereby man determines his redemption and for himself a secular utopia. The human person is alienated and abstracted from the divine source and is deprived of a transcendent horizon to move up to. And after this severance of the human person from divinity, ground is prepared for merging the individual into the society and the individual identity is absorbed into the collective whole and the integrity of the individual is sacrificed for the society. And within the Marxist historical progress, any individual that does not conform to this rule is unnatural, unfit and should be eliminated.[15]

Despite the expressed reservation that Balthasar has about liberation theology, he does however acknowledge that it is at the heart of Christianity because "it reveals the

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wordily economic and political justice. The Christian understanding of heaven thereby is at risk of being collapsed into the future within the historical progress. At this point Marxist's atheism shows the severance of the doxological relationship between the divine and human redemption, and God is consequently eliminated from human consciousness. A door is then opened to humanism whereby the human person determines his redemption and sets for himself a secular utopia. The human person is thus alienated and abstracted from divine source and is deprived of a transcendent horizon to aspire to. And after having lost the connectedness, the ground is cleared for the merging of the individual into the society and the individual person's identity is blurred and absorbed into the collective whole at the great sacrifice of the integrity of the individual human person. This gives Marxist's ideological legitimation of eliminating any individual person who does not conform to the rule, and it thereby branded unnatural and is eliminated. Theo-drama II, 40. Furthermore, Balthasar argues that the role Marxism assigned to the Holy Spirit displaces the Christ's form as imperative for the world to uphold. Marx associated Christ with the historical charismatic movements with political actions. In this conception, the latter have to struggle for a place of moral authority with the former, and to formulate its doctrine and impress on people just as the charismatic movements do.

[14] Kevin, *the Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 145.

[15] Theo-drama II, 40.

dramatic situation of the Christian in this world as perhaps nothing does."[16] This is a very profound acknowledgement and appreciation of liberation theology. Balthasar acknowledges man's role in the shaping of a world in which a Christian is invited to make a contribution; he denounces the mass exploitation of the masses by those who reap the fruits of their labour. He accordingly urged that "the Christian must throw himself into the cogs of this pitiless machinery" and help reinforce resistance to the prevailing forces of the powerful.[17] Such concerns dominate liberation theology and Balthasar's articulation of the same is an affirmation of the kind of theology that takes social concerns as central in its conversations.

Aware of the location and context they are from, African liberation theologians' main concerns are definitely different in many aspects from the Balthasar's preoccupations. Needless to say, it influences the way they do theology in terms of the priorities, methods and choices they make. Jean-Marc Ela for example is very much immersed in the life of his community and his commitment to its service does not even allow him to have the luxury to engage in conversations of theoretical/conceptual rhetoric. Thus, theology for Ela is a combination of his experience and itinerary of self-discovery along with the people with whom he finds himself journeying towards their common destiny.[18] Ela's theology is therefore a journey of being evangelised and being converted not primarily by theological principles and concepts, but by the experiences of the people he encounters. He moves to the people in their location and walks with them hand in hand as they journey through life sharing their joys and sorrows. In this way he does not take an observer's vantage position from which he impresses on others the Christian moral norms. This experience, Ela testifies, made him "abandon the traditional Christian questions, and patiently let another language of the gospel burst forth from the life of the people."[19] Ela does not indulge himself in discussing sophisticated topics of African renaissance, new world order or globalisation except when they impinge directly or indirectly on the life of the poor African people, particularly the village people of northern Cameroon to whom he was committed. He takes the Kirdi people of northern Cameroon seriously as not only the primary object but the subject of his theological reflection. From this location, he is then able to have an appreciation of the wider African realities. As remarked by David Ngong, "for Ela, theology cannot be satisfactorily done if one is not immersed in the life of those for whom one intends

[16] Theo-drama IV, 482.
[17] Ibid., 483.
[18] MF, 3.
[19] Ibid., 5.

to communicate the message of Christ,"[20] and it is here while immersed in the life of faith of the people that the theological language is born and developed. Ela himself gives a personal testimony of his conversion and change of method in mission and theology: it happened one day when he suggested a topic on 'God' for a biblical discussion, and a young lady interrupted, "God, God, and after that?"[21] In other words, the question the lady was asking is, of what relevance is it to speak about God in metaphysical or abstract terms when people are hungry, dispossessed, oppressed, marginalised and decimated by human-made factors? What does God have to say in these situations in which his people live and worship him? Ela thus saw the need to shift discourse on God away from abstract and transcendental being to a relational being who is involved in the contingent concerns of people.

Ela urges that the need to have the gospel rooted in the African reality is not an option put before theologians but is the only way to go for the future of Christianity in Africa. Although the 'African reality' Ela alludes to embraces both the cultural richness and the socio-economic and political reality of Africa, it is the latter that he considers demanding urgent theological reflection and action. He warns that for the Christian faith to prosper in Africa, it must of necessity (for its own continuity and relevance) speak to people's struggles and aspirations, particularly as they endeavour to overcome the burdens imposed on them daily. At the same time, he is wary of too readily jumping to an anticipation of eschatology while glossing over the dream of a better future that the African poor work and aspire for. Despite the challenges in which the African continent is entrapped, Ela prophesizes light and hope from the prism of faith and in this respect his theology has a dynamic *telos*. Over and against the odds of the African reality, Ela shares his optimism thus,

> I could no longer think about any aspect of faith without reassessing its impact on the marginalised peasants. In the midst of constraints and tensions, threats and misunderstandings, the gospel becomes a fountain of living water from which we can draw the strength to move ahead. It illuminates the great questions of existence and nourishes the hope of the poor.[22]

[20] Ngong, "The Theologian as Missionary: The Legacy of Jean-Marc Ela," 12.
[21] Ibid., 10.
[22] MF, xviii

From the above, it can be concluded that for Ela, the Christian religion is a movement for change that can be used as an instrument to convince and mobilise the African people to take charge of their destination and thereby change the undesirable social reality on the African continent.

However, Ela's failure to hold strongly to a conceptual framework almost inevitably deprives him of the kind of compass that would guard against his losing crucial direction, thus straying from basic Christian tenets. The danger is that the Christian faith becomes a human construct and is not perceived as a gift (that is always mediated) from God. A theologian whose thinking lacks a basic orientation relativizes and underestimates certain essentials of the Christian faith which others, not of our cultural and social milieu, have lived and handed on to us. This tendency can be seen in Ela's frustration with the traditional church and theology as exemplified in his assertion that "sometimes the mission must be fulfilled with little outward show- with perhaps no baptisms for several years, if necessary."[23] He continues on to downplay the significance of the Eucharistic celebration as he emphasizes communal living and indigenous liturgies and rituals that solidify the identity and unity of the African people. He undermines the centrality of Christ for Christian faith and theology, whereas for Balthasar, Jesus Christ is "the origin and ground in which our whole being with all its roots is fixed, from which it draws its sustenance and derives all its best and characteristic features".[24] All in all, although Ela is keen to add that the Christian celebrations and activities engender new meaning in life in their reference to Jesus of Nazareth, the normativity of the form of Christ as the central principle for theological reflection and practice is not very evident in his theology.

2.2. HUMAN ACTION ABSTRACTED FROM GOD: AN APPROACH OF SUSPICION

Balthasar's suspicion of liberation theology arises in part from his perception that the divine mystery risks being displaced from the centre of theological language and content. While advocating for full involvement in the liberation struggles of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised, Balthasar argues that care must be taken to ensure that the liberating vision and activities are not inattentive to the divine mystery from which in fact they derive their

[23] MF, 7.
[24] McIntosh Mark, *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame press, 1996), 22. Quoted from Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. A.V Littledale (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1961), 49.

impetus. He argues that the purpose of our engagement in daily concerns is not to primarily achieve worldly prosperity but to have "a real possibility of transcending the internal world and heading for God."[25] Moreover, according to Balthasar, the inspiration for Christian action has to always begin in contemplation. In this way theology must be done on our knees- it must be nourished in the life of prayer and faith.[26]

Balthasar subscribes to *Gaudium et spes'* awareness that despite the desire to do good it is an inherent limitation to fall short of that goal in significant respect. He sees human person as the converging point of many conflicting forces: a longing for perfection at the personal level despite individual shortcomings; alongside a longing for emancipation from socio-political evils despite an apprehension that fate determines such situations.[27] Balthasar moves further beyond this suspicion to critically observe that *Gaudium et spes* does not adequately examine the capacity of the world to unleash negative forces that resist the human and societal capacity to do good. He therefore cautions that socio-economic and political movements, including the new scientific insights for development and improvement of human life, however appealing they may seem, may be constrained or tainted by ideologies which have the capacity to unleash harm on the Christian faith.[28] One cannot but find in these lines the tone of condemnation from the Vatican as contained in the "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation" (1984) and the "Instruction on Christian Freedom and liberation" (1986) that we have already considered in chapter one. There is little doubt that Balthasar shared in the theological spirit and position of the traditional theology of the time that the Christian action for liberation should not have as its primary emphasis political and economic freedom, because they are all fleeting and relative freedoms.[29] The most important aim then, according to Balthasar, ought to be the freedom that comes through the Holy Spirit, and by which a person is indeed free regardless of his or her circumstances or status – poor or rich, free or incarcerated, citizen or gentile, slave or master.[30] This freedom transcends all freedom and lack of it so that it does not matter for the one who believes and follows Christ - whether one is behind bars or not – his or her freedom is not curtailed by external encumbrances however assailing these maybe.

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[25] Theo-drama IV, 477.
[26] Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 7-8.
[27] Theo-drama IV, 479.
[28] Ibid., 480.
[29] J.B. Squash, "'Between the Brutely Given, and the Brutally, Banally Free': Von Balthasar's Theology of Drama in Dialogue with Hegel," *Modern Theology* 13, no. 3 (1997), 310.
[30] Theo-drama IV, 486.

Balthasar's assertion is that both the faith we have received as well as our response to it are God's own gifts. The divine revelation has an innate delight that attracts and draws us to participation in the life of the giver and not to make us live according to our own whims. And once we attain this intimate participation in the new life, then we are capable of experiencing the truth. It therefore follows that what is acclaimed to be Christian must not be abstracted from who Christ is, namely the crucified and risen one. In this way, Goizueta observes that Balthasar keenly avoids the temptation to separate the "Christ of faith"- what he means for Christians over the centuries - from the "Christ of history" - as he is presented to us as historical figure of Nazareth.[31] Our knowledge of God and his will for us is participatory and its starting point is therefore outside and beyond us. It is not subjective but objectively in God whom we cannot access comprehensively by means of natural human reason alone, but through contemplation and worship.

Balthasar warns that the call to active love should not be taken as primary motivation for the service we give to our fellow human beings and the world. Rather, the impetus should come from personal and absolute love for God who has revealed himself and called us to a life of faithfulness and love as bride for the bridegroom. He reiterates that "prayer, ecclesial and personal, comes before action."[32] The union with God in prayers and contemplation is the fountain from which loving action of a Christian flows. Balthasar explicitly writes that "No one who does not know God in contemplation can recognise him in action, not even when he sees God reflected in the oppressed and humiliated."[33] Forming the background to giving preferential place to this fundamental unity with God before the service of fellow human beings is the conviction that God has first acted and our actions are thereby inspired and measured upon that action. It is precisely here that Balthasar's main problem with liberation theology lies. He sees liberation theology as smacking of anthropological reductionism by which the existential questions of the human person take precedence over historical revelation of God in history, and thus subjecting God's revelation to human imagination and knowledge and placing it under the control of our finitude. Balthasar argues for the normativity of revelation and places its plausibility, not under our criteria, but as coming inherently and from within it to "exact from the beholder the attitude of adoration."[34]

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[31] Roberto S. Goizueta, "Theo-Drama as Liberative Praxis," *Cross Currents* 63, no. 1 (2013), 64.
[32] Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way to Revelation*, 87-89.
[33] Ibid., 89.
[34] Ibid., 47.

Ela does seem to be aware of the need to constantly keep theology within the bounds of revelation, as it seems to be an element in the background of his theological thinking. Nonetheless, he takes it for granted that the African people have been converted to the faith and he does not devote time to say in detail how they ought to pattern their individual and communal lives on Christ. This becomes evident in the assertion he makes in reference to Christianity's crucial role in the generations of independence: "Our encounter with God in faith" makes demands on us to "take up the concerns, anxieties, struggles, and hopes of the people of the villages and the urban slums that challenge us."[35] As captured by David T. Ngong, Ela calls for a re-reading of the gospel that "neither evades or surrenders the world," We are called to neither abandon the world nor to conform to it, "but to transform, or more radically, to participate in the transformation which God is undertaking (entreprendre) in the world."[36] Ela does not provide the blueprint as to how the encounter impacts on our will and vision of life, instead he immediately proceeds on the same page to urge that "our first priority should be to stay attentive to the masses of the hopeless who make up the great multitude of the black shantytowns and countryside that have been abandoned to famine and misery."[37] How we are to be braced for this mission and how not to deviate from our purpose does not appear to be the concern of Ela here. And when he refers to Christian self-understanding, it is likewise always with regard to understanding oneself 'in Christ' as he would be present in our African history. This call for compatibility of Christ to the African reality could indeed easily result in cultural reductionism whereby the normativity of Christ is put under the cultural prescriptions.

2.3. PERFECTION IN THE WORLD: AN UNACHIEVABLE TASK

Although Balthasar urges Christians to get involved in the world and offer a new vision to the temporal order and leaven it with the Spirit of the gospel, he nonetheless is not an enthusiast for the attainment of perfection in the world. With this reservation, he even goes to the extent of thinking that even "God's agape of self-giving on the cross cannot provide a technique for the attainment of political goals," because even if a Christian would for example choose the path of martyrdom for the cause of righteousness, not a great number of others will easily follow or join in this way as a means for socio-economic and political transformation. Balthasar's repudiation of the worldly movements is grounded in his belief that this world as

[35] MF, 138.
[36] David T. Ngong, "The Theologian as Missionary: The Legacy of Jean-Marc Ela," 16.
[37] MF, 138.

we see it inevitably heading to death and decay cannot therefore typify or be an anticipation of the kingdom of God. Moreover, the principles on which even the seemingly attractive aspects of it like development or industrialisation, and to which also liberation theologians are drawn, are all entrenched in socialistic systems of distribution.[38] Balthasar seems to think that the world structures must necessarily operate on the axis of certain principles, some of which are not Christian in character, yet in reality we see that no political organisation can function without them. Balthasar goes on to specifically illustrate his pessimism by pointing out that even when political government functions in close accord with gospel principles it is unimaginable that it could operate effectively without the capacity to exercise force through the institutions of the police and army.[39]

Balthasar does not share in the optimism of building society solely on foundation of anthropological principles. He fundamentally believes that there is something that eludes our comprehensive grasp and control as human beings. This inability extends from the small materials, to beings and then to God. In this way, Balthasar gives room for the self-manifestation of the others we encounter so that from their freedom, they illuminate themselves for our grasp and knowledge. Extrapolated to divine being, Balthasar contends, there will always be something (mysterious) of the divine that we cannot have complete grasp of as finite beings.[40] Framing theology in *a priori* philosophical formulas and principles brings theology to a closed system (governed by our rational and philosophical categories) that does not leave room for the working of the Spirit that inspires and animates an authentic Christian discourse and practice.

It suffices to remark that despite the uncompromising stance Balthasar takes in the foregoing, his general approach to reality is symphonic. He seeks the truth of reality from diverse pathways and sources and never stops at a one-sided and shallow depth of reality. He engages with different philosophies and theological trends and figures and stretches certain theological discourses to their limits. Because of this wide-range of engagements, some of which are pagan, Balthasar has been accused of espousing heretical positions in certain doctrinal definitions. He sought sparks of truth in diverse literary works and opened Christianity to what his culture had to offer. His argument has been that the different religions, cultures and philosophies were not purposeless but all were instruments awaiting to

[38] Balthasar, "Liberation Theology in the Light of Salvation History," 142-143.
[39] Theo-drama IV, 484-5
[40] Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theodramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 26-30.

be harmonised and actualised by Christ. Balthasar's theology is therefore enriched by such diverse sources that he tends to stretch beyond the defined boundaries of expression of the Christian truth.[41] However, Balthasar does not uncritically employ idea from these sources. In fact, this caution is at the root of his suspicion with liberation theology's appropriation of the Marxist's analysis of history. He warns that it

> weakens the Christian organism that the alien wasp is able to inject its anaesthetizing sting and lay its eggs right inside it, with the result that the body, hallowed out from inside, serves as welcome food for the enemy. Christians are confronted with a thousand pretexts for interpreting their own eschatological hope in purely mundane terms.[42]

Balthasar thus is against carelessly adoption into Christian discourse ideas from philosophical, sociological and scientific movements which may have hidden ideological presuppositions and philosophical underpinnings that may counter the Christian principle and make the gospel lose its specific vigour and taste. He is conscious of the conflicts and resistance that are part of being in the world and the Christian is called upon to pursue the good as much as possible, but well knowing that the fullness of the good is not a possibility to achieve. This, however, does not mean one should simply be overwhelmed in the pursuit of the good. Rather, effective witnessing involves martyrdom as an act of commitment to following Jesus' own path.[43] The aim of Balthasar is not to oppose or reject scientific achievements, but he rejects their sway of dictatorship that displaces the vision of God of the world with novel conception of a world where the human being has an unbounded authority over creation and the direction of world history. The persistent discontent that Balthasar brings forth is that scientific rationality ought not have the last say, but must be supplanted by an apocalyptic vision that allows for "God's interruptive action to transform history … in

[41] Balthasar's theology raises concern not only from critics who place him within the camp of conservatives, but even within the camp of the acclaimed orthodoxy, he is accused of heretical theological positions. Notably is Alyssa Pitstick who puts forward the claim that Balthasar takes the redemptive work of Christ beyond the Cross to his descent into hell, by means of speculation the experience of pain to Christ in the underworld of the dead, contrary to the belief the define belief that the cross is the summation of the objective redemption of the man- Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2007), 65-66. In the same vein Ben Quash has critiqued Balthasar for a tendency to epically see beyond the Good Friday into the silence of Holy Saturday- Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 195.
[42] Theo-drama IV, 440-41.
[43] Ibid., 449.

contrast to a view of history in which time unfolds into an endless future."[44] At the background to this is Balthasar's strong affirmation that God continues to sustain creation and to guide history to its final destiny in himself. Balthasar argues that Christ does not offer a prospect of a kingdom after the earthly life. Instead he asserts that he is present with us in it, and thereby overcomes the distance between earth and heaven.[45] In this way, Balthasar overcomes the dichotomy between the earth and heaven, the temporal and the everlasting, the physical and the spiritual. And he contends that as followers of Christ, our faith participates in the Son's vision of reality.[46]

Rather than being opposed to the developments in the scientific and social world, African liberation theologians call for their ethical application for the transformation of the African condition. The hope and optimism consist in fairly channelling these ideas and instruments for the service of humanity. To achieve this, liberation theologians consider that the gospel has a crucial role to play in animating and directing these innovations for the greater common good that benefit all. It is within this broader vision that Ela advocates for the presentation of the gospel as a liberating force that drives into action the African people to achieve the change that they so much desire and work for. His critical stance towards the church's liberating activities through institutions like education, health, liturgical services and his option for a revolutionary movement that tears down institutions, including the traditional conservative church's institutions that impede the liberating force of the gospel, demonstrates the belief he has in the power of the gospel to elicit change in the African condition. Liberation does not mean the expression of the gospel in language relevant to African beliefs and practices. It is the bringing to bear the radicality of the gospel and its inherent thrust to impact on the church and its members. The point Ela uncompromisingly makes is that the church and theology in Africa do not present God's revelation in Christ as a message of liberation and transformation.[47] There is need to make sense of the world in which we live in the light of the gospel. This means living our Christian vocation by being honestly aware of our surrounding realities. This call does not concern the manner of expression of the message, but it more importantly demands, the living of it. It is obvious therefore that Ela's

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[44] Todd Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theo-dramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 182.
[45] Theo-drama V, 119.
[46] Ibid., 124.
[47] Beghela Philemon, "Rethinking African Theology: Exploring the God Who Liberates by Jean-Marc Ela" *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 38 (2012), 305-319.

critique is double-edged: he addresses both the social world and the church itself to which he belongs.

Ela calls on the church in Africa to be converted so that it can be a force for promoting the liberation of the African people. The conversion consists in the recovery of the power of the gospel that impels the members of the church to be present to the African plight and not to take an overseer's role from a lofty place or to get preoccupied with the sacraments and devotions while people agonise in poverty and endure marginalisation and oppression. Ela urged that the church "has to try to establish contact once more not only with African religions and African culture, but also with Africa's humiliations."[48] By humiliation, Ela refers to the fragility, the cry of agony, and the ugly scenes of poverty, suffering and death which characterise contemporary life in Africa. In addition to the health and education services that it provides the church in Africa could be seen as busying itself more with prefabricated liturgies than with drawing on gospel principles to proactively respond to the cries of the oppressed and their struggles to change the status quo.[49] Accordingly, when Ela makes reference to Christ as the source of Christian praxis, he does so selectively to underscore his optimism for Christian transforming action for the rebirth of the world. In this regard, it is incumbent on every Christian to take such action seriously as a task that we must live out in the world. He thus aptly urges: "we must walk with these men and women by concretely manifesting that Jesus Christ really proclaims to them a total and final liberation. Faith proclaims a liberation already attained by Christ's victory over sin and death…. Every human being who seeks to be faithful to the gospel should have a historical goal."[50] This kenotic presence is not first about reducing the gap between the theologian and the people's existential realities with the purpose of studying their ways of life and thus be able to establish their convergence or divergence points. Such a theology builds on cultural determinism, which Ela rejects. Rather, he argues that the gospel needs to be presented as a force or power that is capable of liberating and transforming the individual and community and their socio-economic and political realities. From this perspective, it is not enough to see the ugly scenes of the African reality with sympathetic eyes or to live in solidarity with the poor as a demonstration of our shared faith and humanity. The primary motivation is the

[48] Jan Heijke, "Thinking in the Scene of Disaster: Theology of Jean-Marc Ela from Cameroon," *Exchange* 29, no. 1 (200), 69.
[49] Heijke, "Rethinking African Theology: Exploring the God Who Liberates by Jean-Marc Ela from Cameroon," 72.
[50] AC, 103.

liberation and encouragement of the dispossessed to take charge of their destiny as children of God.[51]

Ela expresses optimism in the possibility of the transformation of the world. According to him, the world is an unfinished product, entrusted to us by God. The Christian is therefore duty-bound to reinvent it so that it is a new creation in Christ. A Christian participates in the vision of God for the world by taking responsibility for transforming it. Furthermore, Ela asserts that "to believe is to have a role to play in the changes demanded by the kingdom of God, which means an end to suffering for the poor and the liberation of the oppressed."[52] And appealing to the biblical imperative of the Beatitude, Ela categorically makes this unequivocal option: "there is no question of escape from the present, of refuge in a more or less utopian future. The painful constraints weighing upon men and women, the challenges and demands to which Christians must respond, constitute the terrain on which the joyous news that transfigures human existence develops."[53] It suffices to point out that Ela grounds and frames his option and optimism in faith, for it is faith that "impels us to toil for a new creation where Christian salvation receives its plenary sense. Faith calls us to a commitment to liberation and to the transformation of alienating structures."[54]

However, Ela's definition of faith, at least at the outset, is more of a political manifesto whose ultimate objective is the construction of a humanist society whose *telos* does not transcend the historical horizon. This can be gleaned from his definition of faith as

> a way of living one's life and of being responsible for the future of one's sisters and brothers, conscious that history is not yet finished, that it must still be invented by everyone by making of each day a moment in creation on the march. This faith is rooted in the most immediate, most daily concerns.[55]

Although Ela ultimately admits that the Christian actions of responsibility emerge from the deep recess of movement of spirituality of which our commitments are only but demonstrations thereof, he nonetheless thinks that by living our faith in the world, we experience relationship with God. This thinking resonates with the incarnational

[51] AC, 65.
[52] Ibid., 93.
[53] Ibid., 93.
[54] Ibid., 97.
[55] Ibid., 98.

commitment, but how this commitment is guaranteed and nurtured in the world does not seem to be his concern since there is no corresponding emphasis on any foundational framework to keep Christians focused even in the face of possible deviation or loss in the world.

In the previous section we have shown Balthasar's suspicion, criticism or even condemnation of liberation theology. It is important to point out that although this could be admitted on the basis of his social and geographical location which is different from that of liberation theologians, it is equally significant to take notice of the wider theological and ecclesiastical backdrop of the time. His attitude and response resonate with the prevailing response that Latin American liberation received from the Vatican and the reaction that it elicited from the Latin American hierarchy towards liberation theologians. Conversely, and not with the primary aim of making claims that contradict or refute Balthasar's theological positions, we have presented the theological commitments of an African liberation theologian who faithfully reflected and lived the Christian faith from his own location struggling in hope for justice, equity and transformation of the world of the poor in the midst of horrendous challenges. Balthasar's vision of building theology and Christian practice on the form of Christ can be said to be what liberation theology advances and what Ela believed and practiced, although he did not expressly articulate it as a theological principle.

In the foregoing, I have discussed Balthasar's critical stance and reservations towards liberation theology and have counter-critiqued them with Ela's insights from the perspective of African liberation theology. However, as to whether these accusations and criticisms of liberation theology were in the first place warranted or whether they are still applicable (or relevant) to Latin American liberation theology today is not an easy question to answer. It is possible for one to be dismissive of these criticisms as simply prejudices or biases. For example, the caution Balthasar expresses that liberation theology's optimism in engaging the world, whose ideals do not transcend the historical horizon, could result in the danger of conflating the eschatological horizon with the historical realities and thus ultimately lose sight of the vision of union with God, is not justifiable. The contention of liberation theologians however is that Christian liberative actions flow from the spring of spirituality that is constantly cultivated and nurtured in the Basic Christian Communities. Moreover, why would it be presumed that the right to stretch theological reflections to the boundaries and limits is the prerogative of only certain circles in the mainstream of the so-called traditional

theology. Nonetheless, one must admit, at the same time, that the risks and temptations that are highlighted by Balthasar are indisputably real. The risk to displace the sense of mystery and contemplative spirituality is undeniable in a culture that is driven by insatiable pursuit of pleasure and social transformation, and therefore it is necessary to be wary of them. As it is not the aim of this dissertation to ascertain the relevancy and applicability of Balthasar's criticisms to subsequent developments in Latin American liberation theology, I will not take on myself the task of discussing into any length the validity or illegitimacy of Balthasar's reservation in the light of recent developments in Latin American liberation theology. Doing so would be deviating my attention from pursuing the objective of this research. I have therefore limited my application of Balthasar's critiques of liberation theology to African liberation theology. In what follows, I will explore and tease out from Balthasar's theology, particularly his kenotic ideas, specific aspects that can provide a foundation for African liberation theology.

3. THE KENOTIC MOTIF AS THE GROUND OF CONVERGENCE OF BALTHASAR AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY

A fruitful convergence of Balthasar and liberation theology can be found in the kenotic motif. Kenosis characterises Balthasar's view of all relationships- from Trinitarian life, to creation, incarnation, God's continuous saving work and the response of the human person to God's self-giving.[56] Christ presents the image of God to the world by self-alienation (selbstvernichtigung) of God in love. One empties himself or herself so that he or she can be filled, or contained by the other. In this way, even in Jesus' suffering and agony he surrenders himself to be filled by the love of the Father. According to Balthasar, that Jesus is God even at the moment of the cry of dereliction is special: Jesus speaks the language of God and man and by this he bridges life and death. Through this self-giving, God is love through all situations, even in the solitary darkness of death.[57] According to Gawronski, it is interesting to note how Balthasar goes further to tease out the mutual kenotic self-giving that is inherent in the passion of the death of the Son. His cry of dereliction is not followed by an immediate rescue of the Son by the almighty Father as one would expect of a powerful person or country in the instances of an aggression on its beloved subject. Rather, what we see is the silence of

[56] Raymond Gawronski, *Word and Silence: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West* (Kettering: Angelico Press, 2015), 163.
[57] Ibid., 170-71.

the tomb as the answer of the Trinitarian God. Here is the utter self-limitation of the Father to the Son as he descends with him to the heart of the earth, to the depth of the realm of the dead.[58]

3.1. THE THEO-DRAMATIC

Balthasar's theo-dramatic project provides an expression to the "embodied and interactive nature of Christian praxis".[59] Christian revelation is not given in a vacuum but is always in the socio-economic and political reality of the people in history. To be a vital presence in the lives of men the beauty of God's self-revelation has to contend effectively with the prevailing structural conditions that also demand their attention. And because Christian revelation comes to us as God's love, liberation theology draws the liberative legitimacy precisely from here. It states that in a society of social inequality, God's self-revelation takes the form of preferential option for the poor. The poor thus become the privileged location where God reveals himself, not to affirm their poverty but to raise them up from it. As observed by Goizueta, this is in accord with Balthasar's "retrieval of sacramental, embodied and relational character of the faith and, therefore, of Christian theology."[60]

There is no doubt that Balthasar puts equal accent on praxis as long as it is draws on the self-revelation of God in the theological aesthetics project. The Christian praxis complements the theoretical speculation of theology. Moreover, it brings out the pastoral dimension of theology to bear on the human person. The point Balthasar makes is that all knowledge and encounter with God must lead to real engagement in God's mission to a world that longs for God's salvation in Christ. In the theo-dramatics therefore, no one is a mere spectator. All are drawn into action because God's Word is not only active but has an inherent transformative potential that effects the salvation of the world and drawing all into the Trinitarian life.

Notwithstanding the observation that Balthasar's theo-dramatic theory opens up and integrates liberation theology's concerns, it nonetheless is not expressive enough of the reality of socio-economic and political drama of the world. Along this line, Walatka concludes that Balthasar's theo-dramatics

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[58] Gawronski, *Word and Silence,* 175.
[59] Goizueta, "Theo-Drama as Liberative Praxis," 70.
[60] Ibid., 74.

> would be more adequate on its own terms if his rendering of the "Battle of the Logos" were more attentive to the oppressive disparity between rich and poor the suffering of the poor and vulnerable, and saintly acts of solidarity on behalf of the poor. Oppression and violence against the weak and poor and theo-dramatic realities, realities that form part of theo-dramatic struggles and the resistance to the will of God in history.[61]

The point of contention is that although Balthasar brings out the dramatic tension and conflicts that characterise the path to God in the world, he does so only to point to their eschatological realisation in Christ. The tendency to easily relate the turbulence of the world with the awaited eschatological fulfilment leads Balthasar away from devoting time to details of dynamics of the battles that take place in history and the urgency that they demand from the church and theology.

African liberation theologians argue that the dramatic situation of African realities challenges the presence of Christianity in Africa. Therefore, any theological reflection on the faith must incorporate the problems of social development, of justice and peace, or participation of the poor and marginalised in the society. These questions must not be treated as if they were ancillary to a profound consideration of ahistorical truth. Ela asks that if God is against the mutilation and brutalisation of human life (as we see in Jesus's mending of human lives) his wiping away of tears in the eyes of those who wept, his feeding of the hungry, and the many biblical witnesses of his care for human life, mustn't the Christian faith in Africa be preoccupied with these concrete realities? According to him, it is in the affirmative answer that we can capably and meaningfully talk and take part in Christ's mission in the world.[62]

3.2. DIVINE KENOTIC DEEDS AS BASIS FOR CHURCH'S PRAXIS

According to Raymond Gawronski, Balthasar places significance on the divine deeds just as he does on divine Word; especially as he cannot distinguish the two because God's Word is God's deeds. This conviction can be seen to be an inspiration he gets from one key influence on his thought, namely Goethe, particularly with his famous phrase "*am Anfang war die Tat*" – "in the beginning was the deed," and which Balthasar uses in his reflection on the Johannine literatures. In fact, according to Balthasar, God has never been so articulate in his

[61] Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theodramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 186.
[62] AC, 88.

self-revelation as in the passion of Christ- the deeds of the Son in obedience to the will of the Father. In this case, if the passion of the Son is the will of the Father, so it is also the deed of the Father and not only of the Son.[63] Construed this way, Christianity is not primarily the teaching of doctrines, but of the kenotic action of God.

Christian faith, Balthasar argues, is not something abstract, but is grounded in Christ and the life of the saints as embodiments of "faith's intrinsic power and meaning".[64] It suffices to note that the Communion of the Saints is important for Balthasar because they live in the world as lovers of God and their lives demonstrate the power and meaning of following Christ. Those who love God reveal to us more about Him and theologians need to listen to them.[65] And as rightly observed by Goizueta, according to Balthasar, "the meaning and truth of the Christian faith are not constructed by the human intellect but revealed in praxis in our interaction with creation, other persons and God."[66] Moreover, Balthasar is convinced that, attracted by the form of God, we do not only stop at being startled by beholding his beauty, but more importantly, we are drawn into a transformed life by which our actions become Christ-like. For once we owe our freedom to God's action on our behalf, particularly in his passion and death, we do not stand aloof as spectators. We inevitably enter into partnership with him and get involved in the loving works of God for the world.[67] We seek the will of Christ and not our own will and thus conform ourselves into his loving will for humanity and the world. The truth we participate in can only be known to others when we live it. Balthasar contends that:

> God shows his truth to us through acting, and the Christian (including the anonymous Christian, the Samaritan) likewise shows that he is following in Christ's footsteps by acting in love towards fellow men. All will be judged by the way they treat the least of my brethren, and the only way the Christian can commend himself to mankind today is through right action and determined commitment to the world in which he lives and to building the future.[68]

[63] Gawronski, *Word and Silence*, 169.
[64] Goizueta, "Theo-Drama Liberative Praxis," 67.
[65] Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way to Revelation*, 12.
[66] Goizueta, "Theo-Dramatic Liberative Praxis," 67.
[67] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 46-47.
[68] Theo-drama I, 32.

It suffices to note that for Balthasar, the Christian actions ought to consist in faithfulness to discipleship, to the following in the footsteps of Christ and not following one's heart desires. The love that God wants from us in return for his love is not just the mere expression of words, but loving in deeds and truth.[69] It is only in this way that Christian life is being taken up into God's loving action shown to us through Christ. Christians give witness to the Christian revelation in which there is no separation between the form and content. The content of Christian revelation, namely, the self-disclosure of God's selfless love for humanity and the world, is radiated in the life of Christ and his followers. The most revealing of God's life that we observe in Jesus' life is his self-emptying. Walatka has postulated that Balthasar "perceives kenotic self-giving at the core of Jesus' life and work, as both revealing the heart of Trinitarian love and modelling a life of self-giving for his followers."[70] The form of revelation is then inseparable from its content and the content depends on the form for its expression and grasp by those who encounter it. Taken this way, the Christian actions of care, love and solidarity communicate God, who has revealed himself as love to the world.

3.3. THE FRUITFULNESS OF CHRISTIAN ACTION

According to Balthasar, the subject of fruitfulness of Christian action is related to the question of good and evil. He believes that communicating love is crucial to goodness whereas focusing on self alone, ultimately, is fruitless because the "Son's fruitfulness is seen in the sacrifice of his life for his brethren".[71] Christian fruitfulness is engrained in the concept of dispossession of a believer according to the pattern of God's dispossession. And if Christ's fruitfulness is achieved on the cross – the sowing of God's immortal seeds from the blood and water that poured out from his side – then self-sacrifice becomes the most assured means of fruitfulness of a Christian. Thus, "all fruitfulness on earth is tied to the cross."[72] Balthasar laments that in imitating Jesus as the model of perfection, it is unfortunate that too easily, only superhuman qualities are attributed to him while in actuality "his perfection lies in that very humility and love by which he became like us in everything except death".[73]

The central aspect in the life of Jesus Christ which is key to his being both God and man is his receptivity to the Father's mission. In it is engrained his disposition to draw nearer

[69] Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way to Revelation*, 87.
[70] Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theo-dramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 85.
[71] Gawronski, *Word and Silence*, 318-319.
[72] Ibid., 320-321.
[73] Victoria Harrison, *The Apologetic Value of Human Holiness: Von Balthasar's Christocentric Philosophical Anthropology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 67.

to human beings and offer them love, mercy, and healing. His death is the consequence of these righteous deeds.[74] It is in these concrete actions of mercy that Jesus inaugurates the kingdom of God in the world. After establishing this necessity, Balthasar advocates a theology that is far from escapism into spiritualism, a kind of flight from the chaos of the world, but rather one that is plunged into the heart of the world with all its paradoxes. Balthasar extends this position to his Christological reflection by positing that, although Christology ought to be the starting point of theology, it must encompass the integrity of creation and God's continuous work in history through the church to the eschaton. To this effect, Balthasar without mincing words declares, "nothing more is possible and nothing more is to be expected in world history over and above the fact of the Christ-event, apart from its interpretation and its continuing effects, both of which, henceforth, more and more provoke and stimulate the dramatic action within history."[75] It involves the process of having Christ as both the departing and returning points of theology.

The continuing work of the church and indeed of the believers is built on the life pattern of Jesus Christ through the aid of the Holy Spirit whose presence is assured in the church and its members. It is decisively the post-resurrection appearances of the Lord that awake and send the disciples into mission to continue with Christ's works. It is to this mission of Christ that the Holy Spirit converts and calls people of every age and place because after "the passion and resurrection, Jesus' personal sphere of influence is characterised by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit"[76] and this Spirit guides all to following the path of Christ. Balthasar avoids falling into a narrow Christological vision but integrates the works of the entire Trinity converging in Christ. The promptings and works of the Holy Spirit in the church in history and to the eschaton is a continuous effect of the works of Christ for all times and contexts. Balthasar contends that "after the resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost, the stage is opened for the Son's fellow actors, and they are enabled to truly share in his mission. God's action in Christ is still central (it is a Theo-drama), but now humanity has been drawn into the drama and must play its part."[77]

Going through Balthasar's theology one encounters abundant illustrations of God's action in the world, and in a more definite way in the life and mission of Jesus Christ. One also comes to appreciate the role and mission of the church as the continuation of the mission

[74] Theo-drama IV, 259.
[75] Theo-drama V, 49.
[76] Theo-drama III, 246.
[77] Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theodramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 139.

of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The self-revelation of God as love has inherent beauty that draws all who have encountered it into the action of God.

Balthasar's theology is permeated by the overarching principles of praxis and option for the others, and these are the same themes which are foundational for liberation theology. The manner in which Balthasar presents these themes, particularly within a Christological and missiological vision, and the cautions he is keen to simultaneously bring along, can be very fruitful for rearticulating liberation theology for the African continent. However, incorporating Balthasar's theology as critical corrective for liberation theology does not mean his theology is a jigsaw puzzle for African liberation theology. It is argued that Balthasar relativizes the historical socio-economic and political order by too quickly overshadowing it with the eschatological destiny of creation. He tends to see what is present already in terms of what it shall come to be. Although he admits that the human person must take responsibility in the world, he simultaneously holds that the fulfilment of human plans and actions will take place in the eschaton when the "final communal achievement of humanity in history must be taken up, purified, and transformed into God's final kingdom."[78] Balthasar has such a mistrust of the world order that he warns that the kingdom of God cannot be talked of in terms of development within history. Instead he posits that the former is invisible and grows perpendicular to the latter and by this diverts focus from the present encumbrances that assail the human person, neutralising their severity by presenting the hope of their reversal in the eschatological time. Yet, it is common knowledge that the oppression of the human person is not neutral to God's will.[79] It is against God's will for humanity, and therefore something that is integral to theo-dramatics because there is no doubt that Jesus' ministry of preaching and works were liberative in character and content, capable of extricating the human person from the yoke of oppression and misery. Balthasar believes in the inherent dynamism of the gospel, particularly the form of Christ. I will continue to tease out these kenotic-liberative insights while at the same time critiquing them, where necessary by way of contrast with Jean-Marc Ela's perceptions.

[78] Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theodramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 195.
[79] Ibid., 172.

4. THE KENOTIC-LIBERATIVE POTENTIAL

Having considered in the preceding section both his explicit and latent uneasiness with liberation theology, we will now examine Balthasar's articulation of liberation theology's themes of praxis and option for the poor before proceeding to explore in his theology some relevant ideas that could be included in deliberations about constructive liberation theology for the African context. Before accepting these ideas as part of the building blocks for constructive liberation theology, they will be examined and assessed against the theological positions and arguments of Jean Marc Ela whose theology is expressive of the theoretical and practical framework of liberation theology. This helps to avoid uncritical incorporation of Balthasar's theological positions as critique for filling the gaps of liberation theology. In order to achieve the constructiveness of this undertaking, care is taken not to conflate one position into another and neither to juxtapose the two as parallel and unrelated to each other.

4.1. SIFTING LIBERATION IDEAS IN BALTHASAR'S THEOLOGY

If we were to co-opt into the 'club' of liberation theologians everyone who speaks the language of liberation, we could, albeit undoubtedly against his will, arguably include Balthasar. A closer look reveals that significant aspects of Balthasar's theological vision and commitment would be a valuable inclusion within the compass of liberation theology

Walatka sees Balthasar as a liberation theologian – at least from the perspective of the option of the poor – as can be powerfully demonstrated in his Christmas sermon entitled, "Setting out into the Dark with God". In this sermon, Balthasar argues that Christians ought to launch out into the dark, into the uncomfortable zones of human life according to the pattern of God who was born in a manger in a stable. In the announcement of the Good News to the shepherds, they are drawn from the lights that shone around them into the darkness where they would find God in a manger.[80] Balthasar posits that this is unequivocally the path to being in accord with the mind of God who has subjected himself to human limitations for our freedom and sanctification. It is therefore the way that all followers of Christ must follow. In his sermon Balthasar expresses this urgent call with a clarity of images that is not common in the corpus of his works. He emphatically asserts that "the Christian is placed on the streets of the world, sent to his manacled and poor brethren, to all who suffer, hunger, and

[80] Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theodramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 1.

thirst; to all who are naked, sick, and in prison. From henceforth this is the place; he must identify with them all."[81] Although this style of language is far from Balthasar's characteristic mode of expression, it nonetheless squarely fits into his theological aesthetical and theo-dramatic projects. The darkness of the world is the form of God which according to Balthasar should not be divorced from the content of revelation, for we can only get access to God through the way in which he has chosen to reveal himself.

Another of the rather rare places where Balthasar clearly articulates liberation theology's theme is his essay, "Die 'Seligpreisungen' und die Menschenrechte" (The Beatitude and Human Rights), in which he takes up the preferential treatment for the poor. Balthasar shows that Jesus' ministry demonstrates the love of God for the poor. Drawing from this essay, Walatka has remarked,

> Balthasar recognises that, as part of his humility, Jesus lives in solidarity with sinners and the poor. Commenting on the beatitudes, Balthasar argues that Jesus' teaching here is not a form of theoretical instruction. On the contrary, it flows from the deepest of solidarities: identification with the poor, the hungry, the weeping, and the persecuted. Jesus' entire public ministry can be characterised by an attitude of drawing near (Annäherung) to the least: the sick, the sinner, the possessed, the tax collector, the prostitute, and all those who are thrown to the side by the powerful. Jesus lives out the parable of the Good Samaritan, and he not only sides with the poor, he himself is poor and battered. In his life, Jesus reveals God's preference (Vorliebe) for the poor, the hungry, and the persecuted as well as the merciful, the meek, and the peacemakers.[82]

On closer examination, Balthasar's theology does not fit within the dominant trends of theologies in the Christian tradition. To argue for a space on the theological platform, he advocates for plurality of theology within the Christian tradition over and against the neo-scholastic hegemony with its systematisation of thought into a perfect unit. He laments that this way suffocates the Christian truth in a cage of dogmatic formulations, yet we know that the subject matter of theology is beyond the full grasp of human thinking and conceptualisation. Therefore, Balthasar contends that no theologian has the right to lay claim

[81] Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness: Sermons through the Liturgical year*, trans. Dennis Martin (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 277.
[82] Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theodramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 115.

to exhaustive appropriation of the subject matter of theological reflection. As rightly observed by Walatka:

> Balthasar thinks that any theological movement that seems to cause the mysteriousness of God to retreat before the system power of human reason should arouse suspicion, and he sees the grounds of resistance to such attempts in the nature of the bible … Rather than being easily conformed to one conceptual system, the Bible is characterised by unsystematic diversity.[83]

These views should not be taken to imply that Balthasar aims at isolated and divergent theological movements within the Christian tradition. Instead, he stresses that there must be a "common looking upwards to the one personal centre of all theologies, to Jesus the Christ of God, exhibiting and personifying the love of the Father."[84] Balthasar thus succeeds in avoiding a theology that is caught up in *a priori* philosophical concepts and anthropological commitments. Balthasar's theology admits of diversity because of the contextual nature of theology. In his judgement, "theology must always be a correlation between the revelation of God, the history of Christian reflection on that revelation (in theology, liturgy, art, the lives of the saints, and so on), and the present situation."[85] From this position of Balthasar, firmly held by him though somewhat contentious, one sees how he struggles between conserving the best of the Christian tradition in theological discourse and seeing God operative in other theological movements, notably liberation theology.

Although the above ideas are raised infrequently and are given no significant exposition in the wide corpus of Balthasar's works, Walatka demonstrates that according to Balthasar, "the theo-dramatic allows for the tensions, complexities and absurdities of human existence to stand without being prematurely overcome through theological or philosophical speculations."[86] The theo-dramatic allows for diverse historical contingencies of human history as they relate to God rather than imposing on them theological conclusions arrived at by philosophical abstractions drawn from human experiences of different historical contexts. Balthasar hopes to attain the integration of God's revelation as both an event and historical.

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[83] Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theodramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 34.
[84] The Glory of the Lord VII, 111.
[85] Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theodramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 37.
[86] Ibid., 93.

His claim is that although God's revelation is received as an event, it is done so by actors who lived in different history and have received the call to witness to the gift they have received in their own history and setting.[87] Balthasar is thus against the unified view of God, history and humanity that simply assimilates conflicts and tensions into a basic all-encompassing narrative arrived at arbitrarily. Besides, theology is constructed on revelation whose content is God's love that is capable of interacting with all peoples in their particular contexts and conditions. Balthasar with this understanding thus admits of diverse theologies and the tensions of human experiences of the divine with the possibilities of both acceptability and refusal of created freedom.

4.2. CHRISTIAN VISION OF IDENTITY AND MISSION

Balthasar's suspicion of the progressive movements in the world and our getting caught up in them is grounded in his fundamental vision of the human person which is, firstly, personal before it opens up to sociality. As remarked by Victoria S. Harrison, Balthasar conceives that we can only come to realise our true identity by getting closer to God in Christ. This means our "I" must diminish so we can enter into the given call to union with God and the community. It is God who gives identities and which we only come to discover as we respond to our call and mission.[88] On the fundamental level, it suffices to say that according to Balthasar, without the call from God by which we come to realise our personhood, we would remain individuals at the same level with the natural species. Despite his emphasis on the relational nature of the human person, Balthasar maintains the uniqueness of the individual who then enters into the mission of God. The uniqueness that is being asserted here is not communicable[89] and neither is it determined by inter-personal, family and the general historical conditioning. While the individual stands out as a unique subject, this unique consciousness cannot guarantee its own existence. The guarantee is only given when the individual is addressed by God and given a mission. From this vantage point, Balthasar takes it even further to posit that every human person is created for a mission and mission makes us persons.[90] In this way, what we do then contributes and shapes who we are. What

[87] Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theodramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 93.
[88] Harrison, *The Apologetic Value of Human Holiness: Von Balthasar's Christocentric Philosophical Anthropology*, 47-48.
[89] Theo-drama III, 204.
[90] Ibid., 208.

we do becomes a grace of God through which we participate in the service of God and the world in different ways.

The obedience of a person to his mission, Balthasar contends, fosters fulfilment of his being which could never be attained by "penetrating to the deepest centre of nature, his super ego or his sub consciousness, or by scrutinising his own dispositions, aspirations, talents and potentialities."[91] In this regard, Balthasar thinks that whatever we do in obedience to our mission must consist in the embrace of Christ's love for others in the world to the point of complete self-renunciation.

A strong affirmation in Balthasar's theology is that Christians have a mission in the world. He rejects as "incongruous with Christian way any attempt to elevate ourselves in meditation from what is physical to what is purely spiritual."[92] He avers that from the biblical narratives, God in Christ was concerned with humanity's bodily needs as he preached and ministered to them. Although the overall aim was to raise their minds and hearts to the things of heaven, Jesus was not indifferent to humanity's bodily needs by glossing over them to the things of heaven. In this respect, Balthasar thinks that "any robust socio-political impulse or affirmation of the option for the poor must be grounded in his theo-dramatic Christology."[93] Balthasar maintains that the person of Jesus Christ must be related to his works. This is Christology of mission by which Balthasar attests that as a human being, Jesus freely identified with his mission "with all his heart, soul and strength".[94] Through his work, Jesus revealed God's love to humanity and demonstrated the values of the kingdom of God in such a compelling way. Balthasar puts emphasis on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, particularly his passion, cross and death, which according to him should not be glossed over by making too easily a leap to his glorification. However, it suffices to mention that although Balthasar in this way gives space to the bodily concerns of Jesus' life and mission, he nonetheless always does so in so far as it is geared toward the consequence so that whatever Jesus does is in anticipation of the hour and the cross. Balthasar thus falls into the same trap he tries to avoid of not focusing on Jesus' life and ministry. He interprets the entire life and ministry of Jesus in terms of the event that lies in the future. As a result, he does not give

[91] Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. A.V Littledale (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1961), 48.
[92] Balthasar, *Christian Meditation,* trans. Sister Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 23-24.
[93] Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theodramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 103.
[94] Theo-drama III, 227.

sufficient attention to the socio-political aspects of Jesus' ministry. He downplays the significance of socio-political dimensions of Christ's ministry for reforming human society.

For the peoples of Africa there is a history of massive exploitation, oppression, divisions perpetrated by socio-economic and political agendas of self-serving individuals and groups. The result is profound divisions: rich and poor, masters and slaves, a powerful minority on the one hand and the general populace, disinherited and marginalized, on the other. In this the Christian faith needs to be preached in such a way that it builds bridges and cuts across these social divides. It must be presented and lived as a unifying force that engenders solidarity and brotherhood/sisterhood in Africa. The lack of consideration of personal identity and mission in African liberation theology is therefore not a surprise when seen against this background. Personal configuration and mission is taken for granted, while stress is put on the life of unity and communion with others in the world. Ela expresses optimism in the life of the new communities of Christ's followers: "there is a sign of hope in the ferment of small communities committed to the poor and the downtrodden."[95] The belief of Ela is that in these communities, we will be dealing with "down-to-earth questions, and will get back to ground level where the kingdom is built day by day."[96] With this consideration, he thinks, our hope for the new world leads us to an unquenchable pursuit of peace, justice and freedom for the people. The search for these much-needed values in Africa demands our cooperation with others and in a community of Christ's followers. This cooperation with others is far from the too easily uncritical co-opting of philosophical and social ideas that Balthasar warns against and suspects liberation theology of succumbing to. One distinguishing mark of the community that Ela advocates for is the living of faith as a "ministry that gets its hands dirty," that does not remain untouched by or indifferent to the question of domination and injustice but is concerned with the freedom of the African people from oppression, slavery, hunger and poverty.[97]

4.3. ACTIVISM IN THE WORLD AS A LIFE OF HOLINESS

Balthasar shares in the fundamental vision of the human person, namely that his or her being resides in God who has an idea of him or her as his or her *telos*. The real image of the human person remains with the architect of human life and the individual is called to give it practical

[95] MF, 91.
[96] Ibid., 91.
[97] Ibid., 99.

expression. It is precisely there that a person's holiness lies. The human person's holiness consists in pragmatic response to the call to realise one's ideal life. Holiness is not abstract but it has to do with the lived experience of the person; with his or her commitments and sacrifices. As again observed by Victoria S. Harrison, Balthasar calls for a theological foundation of Christian holiness especially as seen from the lives of the saints which he considers as "new interpretation of revelation".[98] Furthermore, the saints form the content for the apologetic value and fill the void of apologetics which are exclusively intellectual demonstrations. Their lives point us towards God because they conform to the life of Christ, which is measured more by their obedience and not their heroic achievements.

Balthasar makes a distinction between "customary" and "representative" holiness in which he defines the former as doing God's will through ordinary and unspectacular ways, while the latter is doing God's will in one's vocation by standing out for the good of the church and the world community.[99] Balthasar is persuaded that the call to holiness is a universal call extended to all Christians in their diverse walks of life. It is a personal call and does not allow for the distinction of ordained or lay. All are called to serve God and neighbour in the world. Balthasar contends, it is in living out the vocation that our holiness consists.[100] At this juncture, it suffices to mention that, in a way, Balthasar thinks that the goal of each person's mission is the service to the world. Even though the mission is personal, it nonetheless is always open to participation with others and for the world. After following along this line of argument, Todd has concluded that Balthasar "configures love of God in terms of readiness for mission, and mission in terms of service to God and the world. The two are deeply united."[101]

The grace of God that Christians receive is not meant to lead to a life of holiness by turning their gaze away from the surrounding chaos to God in no more than a vertical relationship. Rather, it is also to nourish holiness in horizontal lived experience of encounter with fellow human beings and the world. The grace of God and the life of holiness that flows from it does not estrange us from the world, but it instead equips us to do our tasks in the world. These tasks are wide-ranging activities that encompass socio-political questions of

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[98] Harrison, *The Apologetic Value of Human Holiness: Von Balthasar's Christocentric Philosophical Anthropology*, 55.
[99] Ibid., 65.
[100] Balthasar, *Christian State of Life,* trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 331.
[101] Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theodramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 147.

human life and the world. In this regard, Balthasar expressly denounces any path of holiness that insulates the seeker from the world's troubles and concerns. Although he recognises the importance of the call to embrace the life of solitude in prayers and self-renunciation, Balthasar adds that it is always a call for the sanctification of the world and is far from egoistic persuasion that deviates one from the surrounding world.[102] Notwithstanding these pragmatic task of theology, Balthasar holds to his position that both the source and telos of theology should be God:

> If, however, we are to see the involvement of men as being harnessed at source with divine involvement, then to be a Christian cannot simply mean to attempt to imitate God's involvement in our ethical, social, and political involvements by equally declaring our solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, the captive, and those who endure torture. Rather the significant factor in being a Christian is that he does all with reference to and in dependence on the ultimate source of his action, through loving first and above all things, the God who loves us in Christ.[103]

The love of God indeed comes to us before we can reciprocate with love. Although our love starts with contemplating the gift of love that we have received, it does not mean that it is enough to surrender to God by simply musing on the wonders he has done. To the contrary, actions must flow out of contemplation. Hence, it becomes not our action, but the action of Christ in us. God must be the origin of every Christian endeavour to the extent that "all our actions in the world should echo and correspond to this initial experience of God; for the grace of God is prior to all our involvement, undertaken for God in the world, and for the needs of the world for his sake."[104] Christian life then becomes a participation in the life of God which consists in God's total involvement in the world for the salvation for the world.

The underpinning intuition of Balthasar is that it is God's spirit that moves Christians to act in the world and not through some human ability or capability. And reflecting on Jesus' liberating ministry, Balthasar argues that he was able to accomplish these mighty deeds only because he was God. And by way of extension, it is the same spirit of Christ that those who are incorporated in him "through the process of dying and rising with Christ… have broken

[102] Theo-drama III, 28.
[103] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 40.
[104] Ibid., 47.

through into the infinity and freedom of God himself."[105] This Spirit of Christ is given to the Christian who has made a choice of him for "he is called thereby to realise his own freedom, for man (in the final analysis) is simply what he chooses to be."[106] This call is God's grace that comes to us not merely from some external pronouncements but as God's action that penetrates our deepest being and transforms us right from within and then produces its effects in us.

In the understanding of liberation theology, it is in this world that Christians live their lives of holiness and thereby sanctify the world by their exemplary lives. In this way, the church has a call to contribute to the universal culture of socialisation or the recovery of a community that is at the service of all. From this broad consideration, Ela argues that faith can only be a liberating force that is lived as a shared gift, and that has to be constantly burning so that it does its animating task in the world. This means the life of holiness requires that the individual's life is enriched and sustained by the community's shared holiness, or else whatever is spiritual in the individual risks being displaced or lost and consequently the person develops instead the vices of greed, corruption, with no sense of stewardship in public services.

Ela goes further to insist that if Christian faith is to fulfil its transforming mandate to the world and also expects to be nurtured by the life of the community, it must be present in the world in a way that is not simply an alternative to whatever is there in the world. Moreover, there need be no compromise in its uniqueness nor in its perspective and vision that transcend all existing philosophies and world views.[107] According to Ela then, the Christian faith transcends the binaries of the divine and worldly, and so, "liberation then, contains God's whole project and design for the human being and society, the project of God that Jesus came to deliver to us, entrusting it to the freedom and daring of the believer."[108] Taken seriously from this perspective, faith "delivers us from ourselves for a relationship with God lived in *absoluto* and as a texture of our existence."[109] Nonetheless, what is missing in Ela's consideration of the Christian faith is a detailed theological framework that can provide both a pragmatic and epistemological grounding. Ela argues that faith must be professed in the God who revealed himself in human history as saviour, but this is not

[105] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 27.
[106] Ibid., 28.
[107] AC, 89-90
[108] Ibid., 90
[109] Ibid., 91.

without problems because there is always the danger of losing the Christian vision of liberation in the complex and arduous processes that all liberation endeavours have to go through. Moreover, considering that there are many agencies supposedly working towards achieving apparently the wellbeing of the same human person, but from different philosophies and viewpoints, liberation theology must be keen to have a framework that provides it with a permanent point of reference, or else the taste of the gospel risks being lost in a plurality of ideas and actions. Ela does seem to take it for granted that after the poor people have achieved liberation, they will necessarily proclaim Jesus as liberator.[110] But how can the redeemed proclaim and anchor their lives in Jesus as liberator without having an authentic and integral picture of him constantly before their eyes?

4.4. SPIRITUALITY AS GROUND FOR CHRISTIAN PRAXIS

Balthasar describes contemplative prayer as the pathway into seeing and hearing God and consequently leading people to obeying him. This prayer is distinct from personal and liturgical prayers. In it we not only reflect on God's words and deeds but we, more importantly, imaginatively insert ourselves into the episodes presented in the scriptures.[111] In contemplative prayer, we are led to obedience and conformity to Christ, not only in mind but in all actions. By contemplating the image of Christ in the scriptures we discover who we truly are, and then we open up to the mission of God for us.

If obedience and conformity to Christ are realised from our encounter with God in prayers and thus consequently discovering our true selves and our mission, it is precisely here that liberation theology's legitimacy finds anchorage. The actions that flow from a genuine encounter with God are unquestionably righteous. And not to take it for granted, Balthasar insists that there must be connection in the internal decision to the external actions of the Christian and in this way, individual life is intimately bound to Christ's life to the degree that "one's life must be left behind"[112] and "transferred (Col 1:13) to the kingdom of the beloved Son."[113] In the uncertainties and confusions of the world, man must still regard his task as,

[110] AC, 87.
[111] Balthasar, *Prayer*, 74.
[112] Theo-drama IV, 434.
[113] Ibid., 434.

> To "gather" at the same level as God and with God, since this is the offer God makes to him in Jesus. God's offer goes far beyond all mundane constructs of ethics and religion; it can only resign itself to man's NO-for it seems absurd to man to transcend his own utmost possibilities by negating them. This rejection of the greatest possible opportunity, this desire to exercise freedom on the basis of one's own source, is the sin that comes into full consciousness through the provocation offered by Jesus.[114]

Because God's ways are diverse and coupled with the particularity of our own situations, God could demand of a Christian in his existential realities something that he did not require from any before him, and consequently a faithful Christian would not reject the hitherto unknown challenge associated with the calling on the basis that it is not found in the Christian tradition. In this case, Balthasar concludes that, the practise of contemplative prayer is not only a means to come into God's presence, but it is to encounter Christ and to live in Christ whose spirit inspires people to witness to his life in unique way through history.[115]

The content and purpose of contemplation is love- God's love for us and the world as climaxed in the ministry, cross and death of Jesus Christ. Believers in Christ are caught up and entrapped in the web of love and their lived experiences become an imitation of Christ's love. Harrison has remarked that when Balthasar is referring to conformity, he means both the divine and human aspects of life of Jesus Christ with the latter specifically being his human holiness that consists in his unreserved and unquestioning obedience to his Father. As followers of Christ, we therefore see in him how we ought to relate to God our creator and Father.[116] Balthasar's conviction is that "the life of Jesus is the ideal drama in which the contemplative man can see the meaning of life unfolded, scene by scene, episode by episode- the meaning, that is, which it possesses in the mind of God, and that he desires man to discern."[117] And because of the uniqueness of each human person, and their diverse experiences and contexts of their encounter with God, Balthasar recommends that each person ought to draw from the contemplation of Christ's life their own paths of conformity to Christ. Furthermore, he warns that "trying to fit in with any 'Idea' another has for us is simply to abandon our individualities."[118]

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[114] Theo-drama IV, 435.
[115] Harrison, *The Apologetic Value is Human Holiness*, 40-41.
[116] Ibid., 44.
[117] Balthasar, *Prayer*, 158.
[118] Harrison, *The Apologetic Value of Human Holiness*, 47.

Understanding liberation theology as represented by Ela, the proclamation and formation in the gospel to attain holiness of life must be balanced with social projects that will enable Africans to overcome the servitude of ignorance, poverty and marginalisation. Ela is of the view that the most effective means of bringing about the presence of God in a situation where misery and death have the last word on the people of Africa is by concrete actions. To hear the voice of God in the African context characterised by these situations, people must feel the call "to take up the questions and traumas of a group and awaken the group to injustice from within and injustice from without. Certainly, individuals must decide to speak, in the conviction that many in the group are aware of their suffering,"[119] and in this consists the Christian holiness. There is no doubt, Ela acknowledges, that in order to grow in holiness one must be fed on the spiritual food, and most significantly, the Eucharist, which is the sacrament of salvation. He affirms that the Eucharist renders present the reality of Christ's redeeming work in the community and the world. In referring to its effect on us, he emphatically posits,

> We are asked to "do," not just to "say" or to recall by word. In saying "Do this as a remembrance of me," Jesus not only inaugurates a rite, he invites his faithful, the people of God, to do what he has done- that is, to break themselves in thanksgiving to God (cf Luke 22:19) as the indispensable condition for becoming the body of Christ in the Eucharist.[120]

By partaking in the Eucharist, the recipient is permeated by the Spirit of Christ and is thus transformed into the instrument of Christ's redeeming action in the world. At this point, Ela looks into the way the Eucharist is celebrated in the African church and he becomes disillusioned because of how this celebration that purports to play such a significant role in the Christian life is done in a way that encourages dependency of the already marginalised people.

4.5. HOLINESS AND VOCATION

Holiness is at the heart of Balthasar's theology for he believes that even if it is suppressed, it cannot be denied for it irresistibly shines out. The question to answer is this: In a world of

[119] AC, 36.
[120] Ibid., 1.

marginalisation, oppression, in what way can a Christian, in an optimal manner, bring about again the image and life of Jesus Christ in a way that is exemplary? This is the question around which the definition of holiness of life revolves. For Balthasar, the 'form' – that is the way of discipleship is of paramount significance.[121] The form is the "ideal archetypal image in Christ, of a redeemed and believing man, and, therefore, also his true individual self, and by which he, as a believer, is summoned to live."[122] In this way, conforming oneself to the form of Christ does not mean leaving one's humanity behind, but is integral to it since the response to God is given in human freedom. Having personified the form of Christ, the person does not hold on to his personality but opens up to God's mission. In this person, falsehood disappears and gives way to the form of Christ who is truth so he can shine out in the life of the person. Balthasar maintains that Christian holiness is discernible and must be demonstrated for it to have apologetic value for the faith. This is intrinsic to the Christian mission because it is through exhibiting holiness that others in the world are attracted to the beauty of the life of faith.

Holiness of life does not consist in withdrawal into solitude away from being touched by the decay of the corrupt society and its structural setup. It demands that an individual embraces evangelical renunciation by which he abandons himself and give himself over to working for the liberation of the world just as Christ would. Walatka remarks that, drawing on traditional Ignatian richness, for Balthasar, one's disposition of receptivity and indifference is meant for one to be "empowered with true freedom to labour with God who works continuously in the world."[123] The vocation of members of the Ignatian order therefore consists in simultaneously being faithful to God while also being immersed in the world affairs as the light and salt of the earth. This accurately resounds in Balthasar's "representative holiness" by which an individual gives himself for the church and the wider community. In this way, one becomes a material to be moulded in the hands of God.[124] Balthasar affirms that Christian vocation or mission is within the world and consequently the question of faith that the Christian raises is not exclusive of the concerns of peace, justice, misery and suffering of the world. In living out concretely the life of holiness, Balthasar

[121] Harrison, "Personal Identity and Integration: Von Balthasar's Phenomenology of Human Holiness," *Heythrop* 40, no. 4 (1999), 425.
[122] Ibid., 425. Harrison quotes from Balthasar, *Prayer*, 48.
[123] Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theodramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 89.
[124] Harrison, *The Apologetic Value of Human Holiness*, 65.

insists it must be done in humility for "following one's mission requires that one's personality 'dies' because that is the precondition for opening oneself to God's will."[125]

Self-dispossession is then intrinsic to a life of holiness because through it a person gets grounded in the Trinitarian life as it is revealed in the life and mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus does not determine the course of his own life as it has to be directed by his mission which permeates his life from birth to death.[126]

Although Christian holiness is discernible and must shine out in the world, because of the openness to the God of the bearer of holiness, the achievements and positive impact one leaves on others and the world, are not to be counted as sufficiently satisfying. This is because the person is united to God, and so worldly glory and accomplishment do not meet the deepest desire and needs of the integral person who is not only body and spirit, but has above all a fundamental relation outside of himself.[127]

4.6. CAPACITY FOR TRANSFORMATION

According to Balthasar, a Christian is a person empowered by Christ. He is not in chains of captivity to the limitation of the sin of Adam. Although we are in this world, we are not of it, and therefore, we are "to be heralds of the new reality, to live it and, indeed imprint the new life upon the world".[128] And although we are finite human beings, we have (through the death and resurrection of Christ) been brought "into the infinity and freedom of God himself".[129] A Christian ought to be conscious of the personal union that he has with Christ and its resulting communal dimension into which he has been incorporated and now shares fully in its vocation and mission in the world. He henceforth cannot be truly himself unless he is involved in God's plan to which he has been called and incorporated.[130] Furthermore, Balthasar expresses optimism in the human person's ability to impress on the world the values of the kingdom because he believes that "the new Adam was given all power not only in heaven but also on earth, on the old recalcitrant earth".[131] The call to infiltrate the world with the new spirit is not only to be done on personal conversion but should also include the

[125] Harrison, "Personal Identity and Integration: Von Balthasar's Phenomenology of Human Holiness," 427
[126] Paul E. Ritt, "The Lordship of Jesus Christ: Balthasar and Sobrino," *Theological Studies* 49, no. 4 (1988), 640.
[127] Harrison, "Personal Identity and Integration: Von Balthasar's Phenomenology of Human Holiness," 431.
[128] Theo-drama IV, 477.
[129] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 27.
[130] Ibid., 28.
[131] Theo-drama IV, 478.

social structures and schemes. Firmly upholding the possibility of the new Spirit's effective and transformative power in the world, Balthasar asserts that "surely it should also address the public realm that is ruled by the law of society of economics and politics".[132]

In Balthasar's view, there is clearly one directional movement of the working of the Spirit in the world: The fundamental encounter of the individual person with Christ comes first. Then this new life enriched with the mystery of Christ is transposed into political life of the society. It is only by first converting the personal hearts that the conversion of the structure is possible and not the other way around. In this way, Balthasar suggests, the efficaciousness of the Christian norm is defined more by the proximity of the person's attitude to the likeness of Christ and not to the external political actions. Seen from this perspective, the liberation of the poor and the oppressed "is one of the signs demanded of the Christian to proclaim the deeper liberation from the power of sin and death by means of the cross."[133] Although Balthasar expresses awareness of the principle that in situation of extreme misery and suffering, the social concerns could take precedence in evangelisation, he nonetheless simultaneously upholds that Christian liberation must always begin with the deep liberation wrought by Christ that consequently is addressed to both the rich and the poor.

The conviction is that a Christian is liberated and has the freedom that surpasses worldly powers. This freedom does not consist and is not based on an empty wielding of power on the model of the world but on the freedom won by Christ. The Christian becomes one who has triumphed with Christ and has therefore nothing to dread. For this matter, even if a Christian is faced with tribulation to the point of being overcome, he will triumph by fixing his gaze on Christ who has rendered impotent all evil forces to the inclusion of death.[134] By descending to the underworld, Jesus did not want to leave untouched and unconquered any area of the existence of cosmic forces that may assail the human person. Therefore, with Christ, there is utterly nothing that a Christian cannot overcome. For it is not for nothing that Christ could undergo suffering and death to set us free. And because God has made us free, Balthasar argues, we are correspondingly at the service of his saving plans and actions for the world.[135]

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[132] Theo-drama IV, 478.
[133] Balthasar, "Liberation Theology in the Light of Salvation History," 138-139.
[134] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 26-27.
[135] Ibid., 29.

The Christian action in the world is energised with a kind of hope which transcends the limits of temporal hope but does not replace it. Although the latter is unsustainable and broken time and again, it is not the reason for a Christian to despair because his faith is rooted in Christ who destroyed death by embracing death itself. Balthasar thus exhorts,

> For this reason, the Christian can pursue his course through the world with fresh hope, furnished from its source in the divine. Insofar as he himself abides by this source and quenches his own thirst here, he too can open up the way to this source to others who likewise thirst, can even through his own person give to others to drink out of this same source… Around him he can create a model of existence that is both personally and socially freed from the power of the world and provides a foretaste of the risen life way beyond death in all its possible forms, an existence that is indeed to some extent hidden (see Col 3:3) yet possessed.[136]

The above is not far from what liberation theology articulates and underscores. The mission of the church and the preoccupation of theology in Africa is not primarily the formulation and espousal of dogmatic prohibitions about personal morality, for this could have the consequence of Christianity being regarded as inimical to the struggles of people to overcome oppressive structures. Christ's message is concerned with "struggles against every imaginable expression of sectarianism."[137] This liberative force of the gospel was however lost with its introduction into Africa because of the complexities of colonisation, which arguably considered Christianity an integral aspect of its agenda. It is the historical truth that early Christian missionaries worked under the protection and tutelage of their colonial governments and had their activities financed by their home countries. It has been rightly observed that,

> The arrival of Christianity of the West in the African savannah and forests, then, was not by virtue of its inner dynamism. The missionary expansion of the churches has sometimes been credited to the breath of the Holy Spirit reaching tornado-pitch. The explanation by

[136] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 60.
[137] AC, 9.

> supernatural causes is inadequate. The success of the nineteenth- century missions is not really all that miraculous. Mission structures were the effect of colonial power in Africa.[138]

Ela pleads for an emancipated church and Christianity that will be at the service of empowering and transforming Africa so as to realise holistic conversion of the African human person for mission in the world. In order to do this, the church must choose the fundamental option of solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, and its presence must not be used to discourage people's vigorous agitation for change away from dependence and exploitation and towards full participation. Instead an appropriate role for the church is to empower people and affirm their demands for the right to be subjects in decision-making that affects them and their society. The church's activities ought to be designed in such a way as not to divert the attention of people, especially the young, from the pursuit of their destiny and their demands for favourable conditions of living. Admittedly the path to the attainment of justice and equality is not easy. So Ela warns against the church's tendency to too quickly intervene to minimize divergence of opinions and conflicts as if "unity must be established by the removal of conflicts and the liquidation of all opposition."[139] Such an approach only adds to the complexities of the situation as it appears to give leverage to the powerful oppressors and their established structures against which the poor have to struggle. In this case the church risks portraying the impression of being an accomplice in the subjugation of the poor and the suffering people of Africa. The church cannot afford to be indifferent in the face of the African realities. Ela unequivocally declares that the church "cannot be silent before summary execution of starving young people sentenced for stealing, while lofty functionaries guilty of far greater transgressions – black-marketeering or tax or custom fraud – are never brought to justice."[140] It is therefore the duty of the church as the conscience of society to get involved in the conversation and activities that are concerned with questions of justice, empowerment, solidarity while denouncing all the evil forces that torment the African people.

The community of Christ's faithful is to be proactive and busy with activities that aim at mitigating the extreme poverty, illiteracy and misery that abound in the African continent. While acknowledging the church's faithfulness in these aspects, Ela thinks that much still

[138] AC, 22.
[139] Ibid., 67.
[140] Ibid., 75.

needs to be done. One aspect of this mandate is to join in the self-expression of the poor and disadvantaged in the name of the gospel for, according to Ela, "the situation in which the poor and oppressed live today is the *locus* par excellence of the mediation of scripture, the privileged place of every effort of understanding of the faith, the fertile ground of all experiences of prayer and the celebration of salvation in Jesus Christ."[141] Ela urges that "we must go and discover Christ in the slums, in places of misery and domination, among the majority of the poor and the oppressed people."[142] The presence of the church is to nurse hope in and among the exploited and the neglected of the African people. By no means is this only to be achieved by theoretical rhetoric but, more importantly, by genuinely lived faith which is an authentic liberating force. The call of Ela is for the church to throw itself unreservedly into the struggles for justice, peace, equality and participation of the poor. However, with regard to such matters he does not make concrete proposals for Christian action designed to convert hope to reality. To Ela, it is simply an integral part of Christian living to take part in the liberation struggle because in it is the hope of recreating the world.[143] Being a Christian, therefore, implies a commitment to improving the world and not to escaping from it. Ela forcefully articulates this conviction thus,

> The question of whether religion in itself is a source of alienation is without any meaning. It is always in its historical verification, in a praxis within a society that religion must be explained. A relation to the absolute or the sacred cannot simply be divorced from all encounters with the contingencies of daily living.[144]

Conceived in this way, the Christian religion in Africa would not deserve the accusation of Marx that religion is the opium of the poor because the religion instead is "the *locus* of the combat for the liberation of the oppressed."[145]

4.7. VICARIOUS SELF-GIVING IN SUFFERING

[141] AC, 76-77.
[142] MF, 99.
[143] Ibid., 100.
[144] AC, 42.
[145] Ibid., 46.

In his endeavour to make Balthasar's theology receptive to liberation theology, Georges De Schrijver has remarked that according to Balthasar, a Christian develops indignation for the social evil in the world and is moved into action, possibly resulting in martyrdom, which is accepted in both powerlessness (as a limited and fragile human person) and power (as an empowered person by God). Thus in their suffering of rejection, persecution and trials, liberation theologians can "find inspiration in Balthasar, for whom the 'abandoned servant' is able to endure his 'god forsakenness' because of the silent flame of love that continues to animate his life".[146] To encounter opposition and suffering for the sake of others is not only a requirement but a duty that is incumbent on the followers of Jesus Christ. This is not to valorise suffering at the expense of the blissful promise that characterises the post-resurrection times, and which is the hope of every Christian. Notwithstanding the promise of the joyful final *telos*, Balthasar contends that suffering and the cross are inevitable, and they must be welcomed because it is the same path that Christ our head trod. Suffering and the cross are accepted in so far as they come with the mission that one has been given. For "even for Jesus, his suffering is meaningful only within the context of his mission to reconcile the world to God".[147]

Balthasar thinks that without the consciousness of the cross there would be no need for the embrace of suffering for the other. Forming the background to thinking this way is the conviction that the cross is at the centre of Jesus' mission and towards which his life tends. It both conceals (as the stumbling block for the Jews) and reveals the depth of God's love for humanity and the world. At the centre of the cross, Balthasar sees the theory of substitution and solidarity with the damned: "the Son is high priest offering himself for the world."[148]

Balthasar believes that "the man who is reborn in Christ is given a share in the analogy of Christ's freedom: freedom for a responsibility in the world".[149] It is therefore a "Christian duty to fight for the social justice on behalf of the poor and oppressed".[150] It is the "corporeal work of mercy" according to which we shall be judged,[151] and the embrace of

[146] Georges de Schrijvers, *Recent Theological Debates in Europe: Their Impacts on Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Bangalore: Dharmaran, 2004), 289.
[147] Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor: Theodramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology*, 149.
[148] Theo-drama IV, 349.
[149] Ibid., 476.
[150] Ibid., 486.
[151] Ibid., 486

poverty is not for its own sake but so that others may be rich.[152] Describing God's love, Balthasar says it is "a love which goes in search of man in order to lift him out of the pit, free him from his bonds and place him in the freedom of the divine love."[153] Thus, Jesus' life can be interpreted as a movement towards the cross. The purpose of his teaching, then, is self-sacrifice for his friends and as an act of obedience to his Father. And if his death for all is the will of the Father, Balthasar argues, then self-giving for the other is "the power and wisdom of God."[154]

According to the logic of the world, the call to subject self to God's commandment, which Christ ultimately summarises into love of God and neighbour is interpreted as master-slave relationship from which people need to be liberated. The deep spiritual espousal by which one is drawn by God to lead one's life as a sacrifice for liberation and redemption of others has no place in such thinking of a kind that make a distinction between God's commandments and the proclamation of the age of liberation.

Although Ela does not ground his theology on the Christocentric principle precisely in the way that Balthasar does, he nonetheless does so in a way that distinctively considers the historical experience of Africa. In solidarity with other African theologians he agrees on the Exodus episode as the paradigm of African theology. Unlike others however, he goes further to consider Christ and his mission as the inspiration for Christian reflection and practice. Moreover, Ela insists that this image of Christ is in continuity with God's liberating deeds in the history of salvation because "the crucified Jesus takes upon himself the cries of everyone, from Abel (Gen 4:8) to the worker deprived of wages (James 5:4)."[155] And if Jesus is to be the standard to look up to for inspiration for Christian attitude and action, Ela asserts,

> Jesus died so that people can stand upright- that is the centre of the gospel message. To live out that radical message in its fullness, we must never hide the concrete conflicts within existence and society. To "follow Jesus" is to live out his subversive plan, his stance for the poor against situations of misery and oppression… For the Christians and the church, the liberation of the poor, then, is the basic issue at stake in the death of Jesus. Christians must place themselves beside Jesus for the life of the world. The execution of Jesus, with all its

[152] Theo-drama IV, 495.
[153] Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way to Revelation*, 60.
[154] Ibid., 69-70.
[155] MF, 109.

> gravity of suffering and death, asks us to decide whether we are in fact in solidarity who struggle against the forces of death at work in history.[156]

The presupposition is that the passion and death of Jesus are significant parts of the Jesus' life and should not be detached from his earlier ministry. Ela posits that "Jesus pays for the boldness of his subversive ideas with his life".[157] Hence, taking responsibility in the world and for the world is not something new for a Christian but it is in fact part of their historical experience and consciousness as people of God. Ela however decries the paradoxical situation in which Christianity was introduced in the context of the colonisation of Africa, to which we have already made reference. In needing to maintain close ties with colonizing and oppressive regimes early Christian missionaries gave the appearance of prioritising those relationships ahead of concern for the plight of the Africans they evangelized. As a consequence, they compromised the thrust of the gospel message that states that God in Jesus Christ took the side of the poor and oppressed. Ela argues that in order to reclaim the liberating force of the gospel so that our disinherited people come face to face with it, the gospel itself must be liberated from its entanglement to powerful and oppressive systems and classes of people.[158]

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have discussed, by means of setting one against the other, Balthasar's kenotic theology and African liberation theology but without taking them as mutually exclusive. In this way, some points of agreement which we have discussed will be carried along to the next chapter and to be proposed as building blocks for kenotic African liberation theology. Balthasar's theo-dramatic theory provides an opening for liberation theology's tenets of primacy of praxis and option for the poor. It allows for the participation of the human person in the drama of God on the world's stage. The temporal history thus becomes the *locus salvificus* where God encounters the human person and initiates the journey to his or her salvation. This resonates with the emphasis that liberation theology places on salvation within history, which I argue needs to be supported by a Christological affirmation so that the dynamic of salvation within history is constantly related to the eschatological dimension of

[156] MF, 109.
[157] Ibid., 108.
[158] Ibid., 115.

human life. This attentiveness is made possible by a de-centring of the self and allowing God to have a sway over the present.

Balthasar's vision of Christianity and the expectation that it engenders provides a justification of liberation theology. According to Balthasar, Christianity has an unparalleled function in the shaping of history. It must give the light and taste that the world lacks because it is centred on Christ. The church which is given the stewardship of this work is invited to submit itself to carrying it out in the spirit of Christ himself. It must strive to present the gospel to people of all times. However, in order to effectively animate the modern world, the church must break out of its bastions and descend into the realm of the world that needs to be saved. In its involvement in the world, the church must have the discernment not to too quickly correlate the ideals of the world with the kingdom of God that it is commissioned to announce and inaugurate from within it.

In my choice of Balthasar's kenotic theology to critique African liberation theology, I have exercised caution not to fall into the trap of simply endorsing Balthasar's theology without purging it by means of counter critique using Ela's insights. Although I have presented an extensive treatment of Balthasar's kenotic thought so as to tease out certain aspects of his kenotic theology for my proposal of kenotic African liberation theology, I nonetheless have highlighted aspects of his theology that are subversive to the dynamics of African liberation theology. Although I am aware of the discussions surrounding the reception of Balthasar's theology in the European context, as I have demonstrated in the last chapter, I nevertheless have not considered them as the main focus of this study. At the same time, the criticisms against African liberation theology have been brought by means of contrasting its main arguments with Balthasar's kenotic insights. In this way, the weak points of African liberation theology are highlighted and which legitimises the employment of aspects of Balthasar's kenotic theology.

CHAPTER FIVE

AN INTEGRATIVE KENOTIC-LIBERATION THEOLOGY FOR AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a synthesis of the research project and in it I argue for a kenotic liberation theology for the African context. In the previous chapters I have already, in considerable depth, introduced and discussed liberation theology and kenosis and provided a matrix for a fruitful interactive dialogue between the two conceptual variables. As already noted, at least at the outset, the two concepts apparently stand unrelated to each other considering the way they have been deployed in certain strands of liberation theology. The main arguments I will make here, and which serve as both the synthesis and conclusion to the overall research, is that liberation theology and kenosis are not mutually exclusive, but interactive and enriching for Christian theology in the African context. It is difficult to envisage a situation where a true Christian theology can be liberative without at once being (vicariously) kenotic, following the pattern of the life of Jesus Christ. In this chapter, I will outline the urgency for kenosis as the theological hermeneutic key for unlocking the paradox of the African reality and the Christianity's presence in Africa. After delineating particular elements of Balthasar's views on the scope and function of theology of kenosis that are of particular interest to this project, I will outline some specific features of kenotic African liberation theology. Finally, for the greater part, I will proceed to argue for liberation theology that is grounded in and permeated by kenosis according to Christological self-emptying.

1. THE AFRICAN PARADOX AND THE FUNCTION OF THEOLOGY: THE URGENCY OF KENOTIC AFRICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

In the previous chapters, the lamentable social reality of the African continent that demands a new articulation of the Christian faith and theology in African has been loudly articulated by Jean-Marc Ela. In the same vein, Emmanuel Katongole shares in the lament that Africa "is faced with a food deficit; it is the hungriest continent in the world. it is faced with debt crises… it is the most indebted continent; it has the highest level of illiteracy in the world,

and half of the world's refugees are Africans."[1] What is paradoxical however is that, in the midst of these sad realities, Christianity has experienced unprecedented growth. This is a paradox since at the heart of the gospel message is the liberative thrust- from greed, selfishness, disease, oppression, injustice and war, and for working to achieve justice, peace, and the common good. The puzzling, but compelling, question that begs for an answer is whether, in its theological reflections and public discourse, the Christian religion has seriously explored the relation between divine revelation and such overwhelming social evils.

I share in the conviction that African liberation theology (a theology that addresses itself to the church and the social world) can make a contribution to bringing about a change in the African predicaments. Notwithstanding the criticisms and opposition advanced against liberation theology, I posit that liberation theology is urgently needed for the African context, provided it is grounded in the Christological motif of kenosis. I am equally aware of the arguments among some contemporary African theologians of the need to shift emphasis from 'liberation' theology to 'reconstruction' theology,[2] but still opt for liberation theology that is grounded in Christology. Because kenotic African liberation theology resembles African liberation theology in a number of ways the two might be viewed as being similar. However, the kenotic liberation theology that I propose has a substantial Christological underpinning and an encompassing scope that distinguish it from the former.

A kenotic liberation theology relates the gospel to the very heart of the African reality with all its absurdities and oddities. At the heart of the gospel is the message that God in Christ did not only *put on* but *became* man, entered and mingled with people in their contingent history and thereby offered possibility of transforming their situation from within. This is based on the understanding that God's nature is not incompatible to the limitation of

[1] Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 31. Katongole quotes from Jesse Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold World* (Nairobi: East African Education Publishers, 1995), 160.

[2] The proponent of the argument for theology of reconstruction is J.N.K Mugambi. His criticism of liberation theology rests on the choice of the book of Exodus as its classical text. J.N.K Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*; "Theology of Reconstruction," I will not take on myself the task of discussing the points of convergence or divergence; continuity or discontinuity; similarity or dissimilarity between the theology of liberation and reconstruction. However, it is noteworthy to point out that in kenotic African liberation theology, Jesus' life as it is presented in the gospel is the normative form for Christian life and praxis. Consequently, the classical text is neither Exodus (liberation theology) nor Nehemiah (reconstruction theology). Furthermore, far from following the apparent autocratic leadership style of Moses, a theologian embedded in the situation of the people, discern together with them the will of God and the course of action to pursue in a particular situation. Finally, in kenotic African liberation theology, the vagueness that is associated with the social metaphor of exodus is avoided since the destiny of kenotic liberation theology is not reached by the attainment of social transformation and economic prosperity. There is simultaneous emphasis on the *telos* of the human person as being outside the self and the social world.

human nature because self-limitation is located in an intra-Trinitarian kenosis and in God's act of creating human freedom. In the descent and the abasement of the Son, the inner life of the Trinity is manifestly revealed.

My use of kenosis as a critical foundation for African liberation theology is limited to Christ's vicarious self-giving; to the ethical imperative that is enjoined on all Christians; and to theological methodology. The vicarious kenosis focuses on Christ's self-giving in obedience to his Father's will so that humanity may be restored back to God. As Balthasar sees it, this self-sacrifice is epitomised in the Eucharist by which the Son distributes himself, "spilling it as life into the womb of the church."[3] Drawing on God's outpouring love, love that is sacrificial for the other, the followers of Christ are not left unmoved. They are enraptured by it to imitate and live it; not as invincibly triumphant persons but as fragile and powerless persons united to Christ in his dispossession and poverty but, through whom they are strengthened and assured of victory. However, as observed by Ward, it must be noted that Balthasar gives little attention to the *homo symbolicus*. For although he admits people can partake in God's Word and be representatives of the body of Christ, take up actions according to the pattern of Christ for others, they do not elucidate the nature of this mimesis.[4] As demonstrated in the last chapter, I have explored for the purpose of this research, and stretched to some limits, this less developed aspect of Balthasar's kenotic motif. I contend that the kenotic moral imperative in Balthasar's thinking is as urgent as the other aspects of his kenotic theology. Lastly, with regard to theological methodology, I also take from Graham Ward's observation that "the theologian's task is not only to expound the form of God, it is to be abandoned unto God so that the form of God may be impressed upon the discourse itself, the doing of theology itself."[5] In this conception therefore, a kenotic liberation theologian allows God to move him or her into God's liberative action.

After having presented the theology of kenosis in detail, and Balthasar's interpretation of it in particular, I argue that it can offer a critical foundation for African liberation theology. Kenosis is deployed as a function of a discourse that holds in balance the theoretical performative aspects of theology for the African context. But before I proceed to make the interactive kenotic-liberation synthesis, I consider it important to have a look at the distinctive features of kenotic African liberation theology.

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[3] Theo-Drama IV, 359.
[4] Ward, "Kenosis: Death, Discourse and Resurrection," 54.
[5] Ibid., 48.

1.1. PRECISE FEATURES OF KENOTIC AFRICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

African liberation theology shares in the two fundamental leitmotifs of Latin American liberation theology, namely, the primacy of praxis and the option for the poor. However, there are certain salient characteristics that are unique to kenotic African liberation theology.

Kenotic African liberation theology integrates African theology of inculturation and incorporates the argument of the latter within the search for an African Christian self-understanding. The kenotic model for African liberation theology allows me to consider African traditional beliefs and practices as God's providential preparation for the gospel. The contention is that these beliefs and practices form the rich historical and cultural memory that define the African person. While encountering the African person, God does not do so in isolation from his or her embedment. In fact, from the biblical testimonies, Jesus reached out to different communities and preached the liberative message of God to them in words, idioms, symbols and figures that were commonplace to them. Faithful to this attitude, kenotic liberation theology, while patiently working to mitigate oppressive traditions and customs in Africa, upholds the positive elements such as the sense of belongingness, team work, family cohesion, veneration of the ancestors. These values are part of a rich legacy that have been bequeathed to successive generations.[6] Kenotic African liberation theology thus integrates the theologies of inculturation and liberation in a single unit with both continuity and discontinuity emphases upheld in balanced tension. God in Christ addresses himself to the African people in their location, not abstracted from their history, social reality and the richness of their cultural heritage.

Taken seriously, African traditional beliefs and practices are then seen within God's embracing providence. This integrating view of reality resonates with Balthasar's cyclical concept of history whereby everything arises from God and moves back towards God so that there is no opposition between the past, present and future. More evidently, Jesus Christ becomes the fulfilment of the entire past history and the norm of the present and the hope for the future. Since he is the rule of life, regress to him is redemption and egress from him is doom.[7] There is no need for those who have heard and embraced the gospel not pride

[6] John Mbiti, for example has argued that notwithstanding the association of established economic bodies with manipulation, exploitation and corruption, "economic salvation and security may be best sought in collectivities and not as individual self-sufficient islands of humanity". *Giving Account of Faith and Hope in Africa* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 240.
[7] Lösel Steffen, "Unapocalyptic Theology: History and Eschatology in Balthasar's Theo-Drama," *Modern Theology* 17, no. 2 (2001), 201.

themselves as having advantage (of having access to God's kingdom) over those who did not hear the gospel of Christ. This speaks to the heart of Balthasar's conviction, inspired from Eph 1: 9-10 that Jesus "has made to us …. as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth," to affirm the hope that all will be saved.[8]

A unique feature of kenotic African liberation theology is that it is keen to move away from the categorisation of the subjects of liberation as the 'poor' and instead prefers to refer to them in specific terms like 'peasants', 'dispossessed', "oppressed', 'marginalised' that are expressive of their life and conditions. This is helpful for two reasons. It avoids the ambiguity of who the poor are and puts the people as active subjects in bringing about the desired liberation and transformation in their situation. The reference to the specific condition of the people makes kenotic African liberation theology address real life situations in which a theologian is personally willing to enter and share for the sake of uplifting those trapped therein. And while acknowledging that they are experiences that cut across the immense African continent, it admits their specific types and intensity across the vast continent of Africa. With this kind of thinking, kenotic African liberation theology is concerned with human life, and its dignity, which is threatened by specific conditions, thereby affecting the African's understanding and response to the Christian revelation and faith. In the context where people have to daily face life-threatening conditions, kenotic African liberation theologians prefer to narrow their field of vision to the specific forces at play, and thereby distance themselves from ambiguous rhetoric or movements which may be driven by malevolent philosophical and ideological underpinnings.

In addition, being present and getting involved in the reality of life of the people of Africa allows a theologian to come face to face with intra-communal and societal elements that are behind the socio-economic and political injustice and marginalisation of certain segments of the same people. In this way, the general criticism that liberation theology did not integrate intra-society's injustices, such as the concerns of women and minority groups in the African society may be avoided in kenotic African liberation theology. The conviction is that the theologian, having been exposed to the intra-cultural and societal lived reality, would be left with no option but to shed the light of the gospel on the totality of the existence of the African person.

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[8] Balthasar, *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved?"* trans. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014).

1.2. THE TASK OF KENOTIC AFRICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Kenotic African liberation theology goes beyond the question of relevance to the foundational question of African Christian's self-discovery in the light of the gospel. The important question that is asked here is how to speak and act in the name of God in a situation where people are suffering marginalisation and oppression. These situations evoke the question of the presence and effectiveness of God and to which an African theologian ought to give answer. As churches' congregations continue to increase, and as Baptism and other sacraments are multiplied – accounting for the rise in popularity of Christianity on the continent - the question African theologians must wrestle with is how to relate these divine gifts of God's self-revelation and presence to the social realities of the African people. The contention of kenotic African liberation is that God does not isolate people from these situations in order to speak to, or have an encounter with them. Instead, he meets them as they are in those realities and, they must therefore be the subject matters in the pastoral practices and theological conversations on the African continent. Pope John II in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* underscored this need when he said,

> In Africa, the need to apply the gospel to concrete life is felt strongly. How could one proclaim Christ on that immense continent while forgetting that it is one of the world's poorest regions? How could one fail to take into account the anguished history of a land where many nations are still in the grip of famine, war, racial and tribal tensions, political instability and the violation of human rights?[9]

Kenotic African liberation theology affirms the conviction that the relief from misery and all forms of alienation was integral to Christ's mission. Theretofore, to ignore the real conditions of people and speak only of the eternal elements and destiny of the human person, is not doing justice to both the gospel and the people to whom it is addressed. The gospel must penetrate into the very centre of African life so that like yeast, it can then leaven the African lives and like salt give taste to the African situations.

[9] Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice, 1995), no. 51: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html [accessed October 10, 2018].

Kenotic African liberation theology shares in the belief articulated by Balthasar that indeed, with the descent of the Son, climaxed with the passion and the cross, God has broken into history and enacted God's drama within it so that the eternal God towards whom we journey has already come and met us in the Christ event. Consequently, since the future (God) is already in the present (history), the present must then give way to and accommodate the eternal in it while God, on his part, has taken up into eternity what is historical and contingent. Kenotic African liberation theology is keen to keep in balance the tension that arises from these dynamics. It demands seeing the African realities in the light of the gospel and dramatically setting an interaction between them and the gospel demands. This task however does not require *a priori* prescriptive solutions to be pronounced on every emerging situation. The presupposition is that the Holy Spirit, the advocate whom Jesus promised (Jn 14:16), is present and active, illuminating the theological reflection (praying, according to Balthasar) and guiding every action towards the Africa situation. This endeavour is done in and with a community of believers as they struggle in their life's journey, asking questions about God, the world, human existence, politics, poverty, and all existential questions. The theologian finds him or herself at the intersection of the contingent and eternal elements, and he or she is therefore not the rule of Christian belief and practice. The totality of God's revelation is something that escapes us all and the best that a theologian is called to do is to yield the mind, heart and actions to God.

For liberation theology to be faithful to its task, it needs to have the kenosis of Christ for its foundation, focus and orientation for it is only in upholding the form of Christ in his humbling and self-giving mission that Christianity can contribute to a radiant Africa and offer an alternative vision to the reigning exploitative ideologies and practices in it. I believe that holding on to the kenosis of Christ as the interpretative framework helps to dismiss the fear that the social analysis employed by liberation theology necessarily results in criticism, which in turn leads to class struggles and violent revolutions.[10] This is because the aim of the gospel's message goes beyond conscientizing the people to consolidating them as a people that have been called to a special way of life that conforms to the example set forth by Christ. As a matter of fact, the centrality of the image of Christ for African theology is increasingly

[10] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"* (1984), VIII.

being advocated for among a wide range of African theologians.[11] Christ becomes the foundation as well as the centre of all personal and social actions. This does not mean a claim to the attainment of perfection because kenotic theologians are aware that the call to a life of perfection is a continuous journey throughout one's existence and no one should claim a complete maturity and thereby claim to stand distinct apart and pass judgement of condemnation on others as unorthodoxy or sinners.

The priority given to a theologian's reflection on the African reality in the light of the gospel ought not be construed as precluding the mindfulness to be in communion with the universal church and the benefit that comes from the richness of spiritualties and testimonies of Christin patrimonies as they have been handed on to us. On the contrary, the testimony of faithful, heroic and devoted lives inspires faith, hope and courage in African Christians and fosters their sense of belonging to an ecclesial community that transcends geographical boundaries and times.[12] Kenotic African liberation theology, therefore, does not purport to divorce African Christianity from the richness of the church's great patrimony. Instead, it retrieves from such rich Christian heritage inspiration for African church's holy living that in turn is offered as a gift to the universal church. Despite the fact that an African theologian is called upon to seriously take up the lived experience of the African people into theological reflection, the witness of the universal communion of the people of God is equally presented to the African people so it can strengthen and consolidate them in the faith. A Christian does not determine his or her rule of life entirely by him or herself as one allows self to be inspired by spiritualties from different ages and contexts. A kenotic liberation theologian therefore does not approach the African reality with fixed and predetermined principles, but allows his or her thinking to be affected by the life testimonies of the people. In this way, kenotic liberation theology incorporates and keeps in unity both the Deposit of Faith handed on and

[11] The African people relate their life's experience to Christ and draw from their social experience the categories they use for him. Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 117; Victor I. Ozigbo has observed that the idea of God giving himself to humanity contradicts and subverts the dominant understanding of God as 'powerful', 'self-promoting' that in part, at least unconsciously, explains the dictatorship in Africa. Victor I. Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining African Christologies: Conversing with the Interpretations and Appropriations of Jesus in Contemporary African Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 202; similarly, Orobator asserts that "The Incarnation provides the ultimate and incontrovertible rationale for a radical ecclesial commitment to the cause of social transformation," and urges that the church has a role to play in finding answers to the problems which afflict the African society. It must therefore move from theoretical speculations to concrete actions. Orabator E. Agbonkhianmeche, *From Crisis to KAIROS: The Mission of the Church in the Times of HIV/AIDS, Refugees and Poverty* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2005), 240. A comprehensive research into the different images of Christ in Africa has been presented by Diane B. Stinton. Cf. Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (New York: Orbis Books), 2004.

[12] Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice, 1995), no. 19.

received on the one hand, and the praxis that it evokes from the African Christians on the other.

2. KENOSIS AS DIVINE PREROGATIVE AND HUMAN VOCATION

I have established that kenosis is the way of life of Jesus Christ. It grounds Jesus' life and relationship to his Father and integrates "the importance of the material, the historical and the embodied" aspects of his life.[13] The concept of kenosis is a divine prerogative as it is the lens through which we have some grasp of the inner dynamics of God. It is not only a radical Christological motif by which something fundamentally happens in the Son, but it is also Trinitarian insofar as it is not only the Son who is burdened with the sins of the world, but that the Father and the Holy Spirit are also involved and affected. Kenosis then specifically reveals something about God, namely his powerlessness, by which the world is reconciled back to God, and not to give an impression of struggles and conflicts within the life of the Trinitarian persons. It must be maintained that these exchanges are harmoniously characterised and animated by love.

Although kenosis is first and foremost a concept that is reserved for God, however "as the account of the act of divine representation, it calls into question the nature and status of (ontological and epistemological) human representations before and following the incarnation. Furthermore, if Christology grounds a theological anthropology, the God who becomes form grounds the human capacity to make forms."[14] Seen from this perspective, kenosis constitutes the centre of theological reflection, moral and linguistic imitation for Christian living and language. The life and growth of Christians into Christ therefore consist in dispossession, humility, and dependence.

In the life of Christ, God has shown to the world the way to live a life of selfless love, and has invited us to embrace it. Balthasar posits that once people are drawn into this ocean of love, self-sacrifice and abandonment are grafted onto their nature, and kenosis thus becomes their rule of life by mimesis.[15] In this way, he sees the form of God in the life of the saints and devoted people who have abandoned themselves to be moulded into the form of God. The conviction that is nurtured is that the redeeming fruits of Christ are not only received

[13] Graham Ward, "Kenosis: Death, Discourse and Resurrection," in *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*, eds. Lucy Gardner, David Moss et al, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 20.
[14] Ibid., 20.
[15] Ibid., 47.

passively, but are actively participated in. Something of Christ's mystery is repeated in the life of the individual member of the church. Hence drawing on Christ, if the church is to mediate God's grace, it can only do so with decisive sacrifice and dedication as set forth by Christ. Like Christ, it is in submitting to weaknesses that Christians are strong and fruitful. It is in getting in contact with the banal realities around them, allowing themselves to be touched and bruised by these, that the power of God working in them goes out to animate and transform the world.[16]

3. RETRIEVING THE PERFORMATIVE CHARACTER OF THEOLOGY

The document *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation,*[17] despite its critical stance on liberation theology, admits that the very nature of the gospel is freedom and liberation and it urges that theological reflection and pastoral practice must be based on the truth of the gospel that has the cross at its centre. It suffices, therefore, to affirm that belief in God as both transcendent and immanent allows for the conviction that he must not only have a say in what happens in people's lives, but that he can decisively do something about it. He has a sway over and delivers from evil forces of sickness, injustice, oppression, wars, and death. Pope John Paul II in *Ecclesia in Africa* affirmed that the Good News proclaimed in Africa must give "hope of life rooted in the Paschal Mystery".[18] There is no doubt that in Africa, the intervening power of God is being invoked in liturgical and quasi liturgical rites which have developed organically so that it has both spiritual and physical effects on people's lives. Admittedly, this approach is not to be found wanting in the ecclesiastical life in Africa considering the many liturgies that are celebrated every day in every part of the continent. However, for a church that is still rooted in Western philosophies and finds expression in foreign elements, these ritual celebrations are still detached from the everyday lived experience of the people. In this way, the power of the gospel to bring transformation in the plight and absurdities of the African people is compromised because it is not brought into direct contact with these complexities.

The starting point for kenotic African liberation theology is not philosophical reflection or ideological persuasion, but is the shocking prevailing reality in which a theologian finds himself in the 'Christianized' continent of Africa. Katongole notes that it is this shock that

[16] Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions*, 66-67.
[17] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction of Christian Freedom and Liberation* (1986), I, 3.
[18] Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice, 1995), no. 57.

left the Cameroon theologian Jean Marc Ela with no option but to call the church to seriously undertake the task of re-evaluating its self-understanding and its experience of the faith. The overall aim of kenotic theological undertaking, at least from the *ad intra* perspective, is to make Christianity a way of life from which one responds to his or her surrounding and the choices involved. Christian faith becomes not only an acquired abstract knowledge but an embodied principle that has something to say and perform in the life of the persons and the society.[19] There is no denial that, because of its performative character, liberation theology is capable of stirring a political movement to attain the desired situation people work and long for. However, it is inaccurate to immediately accuse it of inevitably sacralising a political revolution, thereby betraying the spirituality of the people. On the contrary, kenotic liberation theology takes seriously both the social and spiritual needs of the African person. The only difference is that to a kenotic liberation theologian, the questions of health, hygiene, water, education, justice are as important as the questions of the sacraments and liturgies. But taking up the need for social transformation does not automatically mean that liberation theology undermines spirituality. As a matter of fact, getting involved in liberating deeds is itself is a step on the path towards holiness. Kenotic liberation theologians seek to find and present God in all events of life, however much insignificant they may appear.

Although kenotic African liberation theology may evoke a social movement, it however will always keep a strong religious underpinning as it flows from the wealth of spirituality of a people who constantly remind themselves that they are a pilgrim community, and whose true destiny lies beyond the historical dimension of their existence. This conviction is guaranteed by spiritual formation by means of the Small Christian Communities (SCC), Bible sharing groups and other associations which are considered as basic structural components of ecclesial life in Africa. Seen this way, inspiring social charisms in Christian communities is in no way an opposition to the fostering of vocation to holiness in people and neither can it be justifiably said that the people's use of reason is exercised outside the light of revelation.

A kenotic liberation theologian draws from both his or her knowledge about God and the lived experience of the people to form the material for his or her theological reflection and Christian living. In order to arrive at this point, the theologian must have the humility to move from his or her perfect world of ideals to journeying with the people as they strive for perfection in their own world. In this endeavour, a theologian is open to the surprise of God's

[19] Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 107.

presence in the contingent history and lives of the people. In the face of this surprise, a theologian comes to the realisation that he or she is not the embodiment of the truth about God. He or she thus opens up to the working of God in him or herself as well as in others since ultimately, God reveals is present with the people in their joys and sorrows.

4. THEOLOGY AS VOCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

Kenotic African liberation theology, just like other trajectories of liberation theologies, does not necessarily emerge within the ranks of the church's hierarchical structures. Even though one has already been called to follow Christ in special way, for example as a priest, to be a liberation theologian is a vocation within vocation. And as a voice that calls for repentance and renewal from below, a liberation theologian embraces associated challenges as part of a vocation from God and strives to cultivate a Christ-like attitude and spirit of perseverance to them. Ridicule, isolation, persecution, torture, exile and even death become inevitable because of the stance and option that a theologian takes. Therefore, for kenotic African liberation theology to be faithful to its espousal, theologians take their work as a vocation and live it as testimony of faith in the church and for the world.

The kenotic liberation theology propounds that a Christian is an empowered person whose strength and ability do not lie in his or her wealth of knowledge and social status. He or she relies on God whose ways he or she cannot exhaustively comprehend. One submits to God so that whatever he or she does and accomplishes is the working of God to whom he or she has freely accepted to yield his or her life. This reliance on the power and providence of God does not limit one's ability, but instead engenders audacity in the face of giant challenging and difficult tasks because one is assured of a supply of assistance otherwise beyond his or her reach. Having been reinforced by God, the person then applies his or her giftedness and ingenuity for the service of humanity and the glory of God.

As a matter of fact, in a society that has a total absence of a middle class and allows only limited space for independent voices in questions of just and equitable distribution and access to national resources, it is incumbent on the church to get involved in the conscientization, mobilisation and consolidation of the people in realising their aspirations and dreams. This task requires that a theologian takes his place in the midst of the people and be able to reflect with the people in the small details of matters that concern them and their wellbeing and the decisions that they take for themselves. A theologian's place is then both in the library and in

the places where people are busy with activities ranging from liturgies, community meetings and works on hygiene, income generation, digging water sources, disease prevention and eradication, food security, maintaining law and order, etc. According to pope Francis, acting this way, the church would be like a "field hospital"[20] that responds to immediate needs of the people and then asks fundamental questions of their existence. Through these activities, the people are enabled to perceive the presence of God working in their midst with them, and for them. By talking about God in terms of the concerns of the people, theology gives an alternative vision of reality that counteracts the narratives of poverty, marginalisation, oppression, and death. Hence, if the social evils are as a result of human beings' ambition and greed for power, the Christian vision finds expression in simplicity, self-emptying, sacrifice and showing of concern for and interest in the other.

Admittedly, to come to the point where the kingdom of God begins to be perceived as breaking into the African's world, sacrifice and the cross are inevitable. The self-sacrifice involved is not first and foremost a requirement imposed on others, rather it is that which liberation theologians, church leaders and all the baptised embrace freely and live concretely in their lives. In this way, the form of God in Christ that they exhibit and radiate is effectual and thus inspirational to others. Once the life of a Christian is a reflection of the selfless love of God, others can be irresistibly drawn to it and thus form a community of love for the service of the wider society. In this community, a theologian can then reflect on the Word of God together with the people as they are embedded in their socio-economic and political reality.[21]

Like every vocation, the radical following of Christ in selflessness and sacrifice is the working of the Holy Spirit. It is not impressed on people by liberation theology, and neither

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[20] *A Big Heart Open to God: An Interview with Pope Francis* https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis [accessed November 15 2018] "The thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol or about the level of his blood sugar! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds. … And you have to start from the ground up."

[21] The need for a theologian to be inserted in the life of companionship with others is exemplified in both Jean Marc Ela and Balthasar. Ela chose to live with the peasants of the hills of northern Cameroon and they greatly influenced his theological method, content and orientation. In a similar way, Balthasar together with Adrienne von Speyr (whom he directed that his works should not be separated from hers) formed a religious society, the Community of St. John in which people would discern the will of God and, as individuals or community, influence the developments in the social world with the Spirit of Christ. It is generally believed that Speyr's mystical experiences and visions had great impact on the theology of Balthasar and kept him not only isolated from the main theological camps of his time, but also contributed in part to his resignation from the Jesuit order.

is it to be disparaged in the Christian consciousness. Kenotic liberation theology thus does not valorise sacrifice or suffering for its own sake, but is to be embraced in circumstance where it is accepted for the sake of the other and for the glory of God. The challenge it takes on itself is the Christian duty to spread the gospel so that it may inspire the grafting of the form of Christ onto the lives of the people. Its undergirding conviction is that enduring misunderstanding, rejection, persecution is possible within the embrace of the love of God and of neighbour. This is not done under compulsion of any established authority, but out of the inclination of the will towards truth and love of God. It is believed that at this juncture, one has acquired the freedom to do good by inclination and not by coercion. Since freedom is God's gift to the human person, he or she responds in freedom to God who guarantees it.

A kenotic theology takes human's temporal needs seriously; it simultaneously upholds that Christian life transcends the present into the unseen future towards which one already lives in hope. This hope is both eschatological and performative and has its dynamics at work in the present which in turn sustains the long-awaited realisation of their fullness. A Christian is not preoccupied with counting accumulated results and achievements from the work done because his timeline transcends the present into a future which is beyond reckoning. There is only one thing that is worth pursuing: to do one's duty as a mere servant while leaving the rest with God (Lk 17:10). This attitude easily leads to a free acceptance of the hour of darkness, to the extent of counting as nothing the supreme sacrifice of death in obedience to the call and will of God. Seen from this perspective, kenotic liberation theology does not displace the centrality of the cross in Christian consciousness: it, in fact, reinforces it contrary to the *Instruction on Christian Freedom*.[22] Moreover, the subjection of one's own humanity to God means to follow in the footsteps of Christ. Consequently, the time at people's disposal becomes not their own because their existence is owed to God and to others and not to themselves. This self-giving, it must be upheld, is done out of free will once the individual has embraced the Christian call and is on path to pursuing a *telos* which is outside the self.[23] At the end of it all, this commitment presupposes that there is a rule of life, and that is provided by the gospel.

5. THE GOSPEL AS LIFE-GIVING FORCE

[22] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction of Christian Freedom and Liberation* (1986), II, 22.
[23] Balthasar, *Theology of History*, 40-41.

The Christian message which has to be announced to the world is God's loving plan and work for the salvation of humanity and the world. A liberation theologian would be keen to distinguish between the Word *of* God and the word *about* God. The former is received as gratuitous gift from God, while the latter is generated by the theologian and the community in whose life and faith he shares. In this respect, every theological position is to be subjected to the authority of the thrust of Christian revelation as it is contained in the Scriptures and the Sacred Tradition.

One dominant understanding of the gospel in kenotic liberation theology is that it has a liberative potential which can transform the hearts of individual people, and has the power to consolidate and transform them as a people thereby influencing the structures of their society. If Christian revelation is life-giving (Jn 10:10), then it must address itself to individual hearts, to the institutions and structures of the society that have been placed at the service of human life. The gospel, then, has an anthropological dimension that must interact with the human persons not in isolation from their social realities. The proclamation of the gospel is the offering of liberation of both the human person and the world from sin and death and the freedom for the promise of abundant life. Seen this way, "people come to see Christ as the Lord of life and come to understand that the gospel message is challenging them to reject alienation and servitude and anything that leads to death rather than life. Christians receive from the risen Christ their new energy for this option."[24] The gospel does not only offer a raw material for theoretical reflection, but is, most importantly, performative as it ushers the listener into a new life which he or she then shares with the others, together propagating it in the world. The life that is promised has begun already in the present and every Christian is called upon to be an agent at the service of the promised life. The consciousness of being at the service of God and other fellow human beings and the world is a driving force behind the theological commitment of a kenotic African liberation theologian.

For the Word of God to take root in both individual hearts and structures of the society, it has to be related to people's existential realities, and this demands that the theologian must be in the location of the people and discover or discern with them what God says and demands of them in specific situations. For the Word of God to have its performative thrust, it mustn't be preached as an *a priori* dogmatic formula but as a dynamic force that is capable of interacting and transforming every situation at all times. And to have this performative

[24] Philip Gibbs, *The Word in the Third World: Divine Revelation in the Theology of Jean-Marc Ela, Aloysius Pieris and Gustavo Gutierrez* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1996), 129.

function, it is demanded that the gospel be brought into contact with the African reality. It is therefore incumbent on African theologians, and in fact every Christian, to bring the gospel to the very heart and the strata of African society. It is expected of them to silently insert themselves into the fabric of people's lives and apply themselves - their giftedness, innovation, knowledge, skills - from within the experience and reality of the people, thereby making a difference that the subjects would not have otherwise been accomplished if left to their own devices. This is an act of complete self-sacrifice by which one disappears into the world not for self-seeking motive, but to give light and taste to others in the world.[25]

6. COMMUNITY-CENTRED

A kenotic African liberation theologian willingly accepts to share in the experience of the members of the community he is theologising about. He or she seeks to be with them as they encounter, discern and respond to God's revelation in Christ. The purpose of reflecting on the Word of God, then, is to shed light on both the personal and shared experiences of the people in their relationship with their God. In this way, the Word of God serves to foster relational and community spirit in and among individual persons. As the people go about struggling to find meaning in daily experiences, as they strive to find solutions to the challenges of life, and as they celebrate life and seasons, theology becomes one of the building blocks for their present way of life and an aspiration for the future. It is expected that one inevitably begins to lead a life of self-expropriation inclined towards a communal life. The individual *telos* that a person has discovered by being a Christian finds its way into the stream of other *telos* and then organically grows and is thus able to make greater impact on the world. This act of fraternizing is a free submission of the individual's self-interest for the higher good of the whole. The individual person, who now re-discovers self and mission in the light of the Word of God, becomes a living testimony because he or she embodies and reflects the gift of the new life received, the life of incorporation into the Holy Trinity.

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[25] Asle Eikrem, *God as Sacrificial Love: A Systematic Exploration of a Controversial Notion* (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 166-167. The imagery of "light for the world" and "salt for the earth" has been used by Joseph Ogbonnaya to argue for a creative theological praxis that contributes to the social transformation of Africa. Joseph Ogbonnaya, "The Church in Africa: Salt of the Earth?" in *The Church as Salt and Light: Path to an Ecclesiology of Abundant Life*, eds. Joseph Ogbonnaya and Alex Ojacor (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 65-87. However, Ogbonnaya's understanding of the imagery of light and salt is inadequate in two ways: First, he looks at the church as a powerful force that ought to exert its robust influence in the social world and thus effect the desired situation. Secondly, his grip on the Christological form for Christian praxis is rather lose and vague.

Theology has a role to foster in the much needed selflessness and community spirit by which people are drawn into the Trinitarian life of unity and love and thereby act in unity and solidarity for the common good of all. Discipleship, then, is a life of de-centring of self as the imitation of Christ in his self-giving. Encountered by the form of Christ, one is enraptured by his splendour and is thus transformed to rise above personal motivation to a life of participation in the life of God (on the vertical axis) and a sharing in the wider community of people of God (on the horizontal level). At this juncture, the individual performs actions that pertain to the community according to the designs of the life of the Holy Trinity into whom he or she has been drawn. The person's being, with his or her giftedness, knowledge, skills and expertise, is not for personal gratification but for the service of the community and the glorification of God.

7. A SERVING THEOLOGY

The task of kenotic liberation theology is to prophetically foster a society that is grounded in the love of God. In this case, the goal of theology is therefore to have love as the hallmark of personal motivations and as the facilitator of all structural alignments of the wider society. Katongole argues that it is possible to have a theological vision for a community, and he poignantly demonstrates it with the life of bishop Paride Taban of South Sudan. The bishop's inspiration for founding the peace village of Kuron in South Sudan was not ideological or philosophical, but to model the unity of the persons of the Trinity.[26] In this way, the bishop has been able to present to both the individual person as well as to the wider community, the image of the Trinitarian love and unity for their imitation. By attuning human endeavours to achieve higher goods, kenotic liberation theology raises the human consciousness to those higher values which transcend the individual's personal motivations and oppose all vices that tend to creep into human works. Furthermore, this theology enhances the embrace of values which transcend physical gratification to highlighting higher values such as justice, peace and dignity. People are able to rise above the pressing demand to gratify transient goods at the expense of the lasting values.

[26] Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 141-146. Although bishop Taban did not have a clear blueprint of a well-structured community and the anticipated results that would accrue from it, the image of a united people according to the pattern of the Holy Trinity was in his mind. It was therefore a journey of faith that was opened into the future. It was a journey together with the people and that demanded patience and perseverance, and sometimes not knowing precisely what do in certain situations.

The kingdom of God that we beseech God to bestow on us and towards which we strive is not only to be expected, but is to be realised painfully and patiently in the here and now, through the ordinary and extraordinary words and actions of men. Since it is a kingdom that is and is not yet, the work of building it is ongoing to eternity. With this understanding, kenotic liberation theology does not first and foremost aim at taking over positions of power. Rather, its immediate preoccupation is to initiate a process of the transformation of hearts and structures. It involves having an imprint on history that opens into the future. The Christian duty therefore consists in relentlessly pursuing the values of the kingdom of God both as individual persons and as collective people of God, and have these values enshrined in the hearts of the African people and their social structures.

With kenotic African liberation theology, the conviction is nourished that the believers of Christ journey towards a heavenly kingdom but which they are called to enact today so that they can make a difference to the alarming misery across the continent. It is incumbent on African theologians not to be silent or indifferent to these realities because they contravene and debilitate the values of the kingdom of God. The Christian values cannot be infused into the world only by means of spiritual rituals such as the celebration of sacraments without the corresponding stress on the concrete social measures that is needed. In taking this approach of working for the kingdom, there is no dichotomy between the spiritual and material; between the eternal and temporal; between the heavenly and the earthly.

As an ongoing process, the work of building the kingdom of God here on earth is an arduous task that demands painful patience and sacrifices. The work of orienting people from different walks of life to form a people of one mind and purpose is not within the competence of human ingenuity alone. It demands that the Christian listens for the voice of God and submits to his promptings that he or she finds in personal prayer or in the life of the community that has its foundation in God. Because God has chosen to live in the church as the community of the pilgrim people of God, and to be more widely obeyed in it, his law and logic ought to triumph over individual human will and desires. In this dispensation, the concept of justice is subjected to love and mercy as these incorporate all- the oppressed and the oppressors, the poor and the rich, the chiefs and the subjects, the dispossessed and the possessed. As the church makes the preferential option for the disadvantaged, it is obliged at the same time to offer pastoral solicitude to the oppressing party and prophetically cross the aisle thus affirming the universal love and mercy of God.

The church as the community of the people of God is not to lose sight of the justice of love that Pope Benedict XVI highly recommends in *Africae Munus* and demonstrates by referring to the complaint that Jesus met when he went into Zacchaeus' house. The complaint, the pope explains, derives from limited human justice which, if it is to become perfect, must turn towards the divine[27] that seeks out all, the offended and the offender. As co-workers and agents of building the kingdom of God here on earth, the ultimate judgment on situations and matters related to the kingdom of God does not reside ultimately within the competence of a theologian or believer. Care needs to be exercised to relate every situation to God's justice which alone understands the depth of the secret motives people have for doing everything. The human person is a mystery because, although he or she is of our shared human nature, his or her vocation transcends it and therefore escapes our full grasp. A complete knowledge of him or her and the scope and content of his or her life's timeline eludes others for it is only God who knows all. Thus, kenotic liberation theologians will be aware of this mystery and allow a space for the final judgement to be pronounced by God himself, the one who knows the secret motives behind every action.

The humble attitude of a Christian, while maintaining firm countenance, towards others and the world will make great contribution to Christian fruitfulness in the world as it will allow for approachability and contact with the world without claiming either absolutism or compromise in relation to the Christian convictions.[28] However, this does not mean in any way an attempt to relativize the gospel imperative and the missionary mandate of the church and every believer. While maintaining the unquestionable rule of the gospel as the infallible Christian message against the fallible philosophical and scientific knowledge, a theologian must guard against asserting theological positions as an infallible authority that occupies a judgement throne to condemn all divergent views and human experiences. The testimony of each believer is to be taken as integral to the experience of the universal communion of the people of God. This acknowledgement demands of a theologian humility to see the workings of the Holy Spirit in God's people of all times and places. Pressing for this need, Balthasar questioned and recommended the following,

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[27] Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* (2011), no. 25: http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20111119_africae-munus.html [accessed October 10 2018].

[28] Kwame Bediako, "Christian Witness in the Public Sphere: Some Lessons and Residual Challenges from the Recent Political History of Ghana," in *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West and the World*, eds. Lamin Sanneh and Joel Carpenter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 118-119. Bediako is dismissive of certain suspicion among theologians that the increased presence of Christianity could result in Christendom scenario in Africa.

> How could it be forgotten that the revelation of the riches of Christ has infinitely more fullness than all the concepts and structures of every theology and of every Christian consciousness at any period at all? Let us therefore not cling tightly to structures of thought, but let us plunge into the primal demands of the gospel, which are also the primal graces, visible and capable of being grasped in the example of Christ, who gave himself for all in order to save all.[29]

This attitude allows for both mystery and rationality to be exhibited in the Christian's contact with the world so that God's mystery finds its path into the realm of the historical world through dialogue.[30] Furthermore, according to Balthasar, as our light shines out in the world, it must be remembered that it involves inevitable struggles against the world's own claims to the truth, and hence we must be prepared to confront these truth claims with patience, humility and courage.[31] However the agenda of the struggles is not to establish Christian hegemony over all (unbelievers) by compelling them into the Christian faith and practice. Albeit the primary duty to give light and taste to the world, the Christian in his or her engagement with the world is required to give a space of freedom within which people respond without coercion to the gospel for God himself has created everyone, calls them and deals with them without revoking or destroying their creaturely freedom. Nonetheless, he does not leave them to the fate of their finite capacities, but continues to aid them to keep their gaze on a horizon beyond their grasp.

8. THE NORMATIVITY OF THE FORM OF CHRIST FOR THE VISION OF SOCIETY

Like every Christian, as theologians are drawn into the plan of God for themselves and for the world, they realise that they are at the intersection of belonging to God on the one hand and to the world on the other. They are called to act with and on behalf of God – with God's power - for the world and to serve the needs of their fellow human beings respectively as set forth by the lived example of Christ. The demand being made of theologians is to operate

[29] Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions*, 67-70.
[30] Ibid., 52.
[31] Ibid., 64.

within a certain imaginative framework which is biblically based, while at the same time being attentive to the contingent historical and material needs of people's daily lives. Even if a Christian is drawn into God's plan and acts for him in the world, one does not stand over and against the unchosen others because his or her election is not for him or herself alone: he or she is sent on a mission for the entire world. According to Balthasar, this is "vicarious representation, bearing responsibility and sacrifice"[32] for the others and for the world. Balthasar has likened this altruism to the vine: "the fruit that the vine brings forth from the chosen one is not used for him but for the refreshment of the other one, dying of thirst."[33]

This demand brings to the fore the thrust of Christological vicarious kenosis of the gospel which is aimed at not only the meaning of Jesus Christ, but his significance for the human person in his or her experience.[34] In this way, kenotic African liberation theology is faithful to the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth and his attentiveness to the questions of human life. And consequently, as disciples of Christ, a kenotic liberation theologian cannot look up to heaven while neglecting the awful sight of socio-economic and political realities because Jesus did not afford to be indifferent to them in his ministry.[35] This commitment is not to be limited to Christian personal responsibility but must be transposed and enshrined in the society's structures so that they, too are instruments at the service of the kingdom of God and able to organise the integrative wellbeing of the people. Overall, there is a mutual exchange of self-giving: with the individuals giving in their best to the structures and the structures sustaining the wellbeing of the individual persons. Balthasar believes that in this manner, all will tend towards the vicarious exchange achieved by Christ: "He is dead so that we may live, his light is extinguished so that the darkness in us may become light. In all this he is bearing our death, our darkness, so that the exchange may be perfect."[36] For these exchanges to be possible, according to Balthasar, the human being must be open and receptive to transcendence from outside the self. This openness is the substructure for all relationship, vulnerability and love.[37]

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[32] Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions*, 59.
[33] Ibid., 59.
[34] Tatha Wiley, "Thinking of Christ," in *Thinking of Christ: Proclamation, Explanation, Meaning*, ed. Tatha Wiley (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003), 24-25.
[35] Ibid., 178.
[36] Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions*, 63.
[37] This point has been captured well by Yves de Maeseneer's article on Balthasar's comparison of the image of angels in Bonaventure and Maria Rainer Rilke. Balthasar approvingly writes on Bonaventure that once illumined by God, "the human being is enabled to perceive himself and the creatures in their true proportion: everything is oriented and returned to the figure of Christ. The whole creation is perceived as the expression of

It is believed that upholding the Christian vision of society helps theologians and the church from falling into being proponents of "lies of noble ideals such as civilisation and humanitarianism",[38] which serve the minority rich people and their institutional ideology at the expense of the real needs of the people. Furthermore, because the Christian motivation for every action is for uplifting the other according to the example of Christ, a Christian stance and action should not give the impression that Christian religion can afford to be part of the irresponsible demand of sacrifice that involves the dispensability of innocent human lives, while those who urge for such sacrifices personally exempt themselves from coming face to with them.[39]

The above tendency stands contrary to Jesus's life who, wherever he found himself in the midst of the people in need, always set out to serve, help and offer them relief from all their troubles. He did this to the point of the ultimate sacrifice of his life so that humanity may have abundant life. Inspired by this selflessness, a Christian lives not only for him or herself, but also for others. He or she is expected to sacrifice for others and not to impress it on them while he or she remains untouched by the price associated with the option taken. A Christian commands action by inspiring courage, trust and sympathy by the way he or she responds to a specific situation and not by means of obliging others into it. In this conception, the role of theology in difficult circumstances, is not to be patronizing and offer a rigid framework of thinking that instead inhibits people's creative and liberative initiatives. Rather, the gospel is to be offered as an illuminating force that stirs and leads people into the future. Presupposing the active presence of the Holy Spirit, whose promptings one must discern together with the people, a kenotic theologian, or indeed every Christian, sets an example by him or herself along the path of struggles that others are expected to take towards their liberation. As a matter of fact, it gives little of no credence for one to claim to have inspiration in respect to a given situation of the people while he or she stands aloof and distant without getting involved in it. Against this background, Katongole calls for the closeness of the church to the people in their lived reality. For him, this is kenosis which he defines kenosis in terms of location:

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the Son". Yves De Maeseneer, "Angels as Mirrors of the Human: The Anthropologies of Rilke and Bonaventure Through the Lenses of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Theologica* 6, no. 1 (2016), 113. The gaze on Christ does not mean an escape from the world. On the contrary, the love of God binds one to the world and its woes which one has to endure in the process of imprinting on the world the mark of God.

[38] Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 14.

[39] Ibid., 17.

> A church that is grounded and lives out of the story of the incarnation presses into these very same discarded villages and backwaters in a way that redeems them and makes them sacred. This is the politics of the incarnation, the story of God who "dwells among us" and who invests local existence with an eternal significance.[40]

The gospel of Christ must not only announce the kingdom of God, but it must as well inaugurate it in both hearts and in the inter personal relations of people in the community. It must enter into the fabrics of human existence with all its loftiness and banality. The kingdom of God begins to be seen to take roots in the very human and social contingencies just as Jesus did by allowing himself to be touched by sinners and unrighteous people. From their encounter with him, they experienced something special happening in their lives and in their midst. The proximity of the divine to the human allows for the exchange between the pure and impure; between the sacred and profane; between the religious and secular. If theology has to announce and contribute to the coming of the kingdom of God in Africa, it must be kenotic in character so as to evoke the liberative force of the gospel so that it lights up the dark forces that claim control over people.

Being embedded in the African reality does not, however, guarantee that righteousness will evidently reign in Africa since people have the freedom to receive or reject the gift of light that is offered to them. Moreover, aware that sin will remain in the world until the second coming of Christ, the battle against it, according to kenotic African liberation theologians, will continue until all people find their destiny in God. Against this background, and with the power of God, the church's pastoral-spiritual activities are to be intensified, targeting people's personal needs as well as the social struggles. Although these activities are designed and executed by human beings, they are constantly reminded to bear in mind that theirs is a participation in a wider vision of God for the world, and the best human beings can be is participative agents and not architects of the overall vision. This recognition calls for humility and admission of one's limitedness. Aware of their human inadequacies, kenotic African liberation theology allows for formation and learning experience not only from God but from the ordinary people's patience, courage and perseverance in the face of their adversities. In this way, the church and all its members are made aware of both their own

[40] Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 144.

strength as well as failings towards God and neighbour and are obliged to exercise patience, understanding and forgiveness towards other fellow sinners.

CONCLUSION

I have argued for a kenotic liberation theology that is grounded in the kenotic motif of Christ as the most fruitful theological discourse and praxis for the African continent. I posit that kenotic African liberation theology can hold in balance the tension that arises from the paradox of Christianity and the social reality of the African continent, ensuring that justice is done to both the truth about God and the condition of the human person. Central to kenotic African liberation theology is the re-reading of the gospel by, and with, the African people to rediscover the liberative force that is inherent in it so that it can contribute to their liberation from both sin and the social evils. Like every liberation theology, the preoccupation of kenotic African liberation theology does not mainly subsist in ritual laws and practices, but in directing the gospel to the socio-economic and to political realities. Furthermore, kenotic liberation theology urges that the church leader, the theologian and every believer must be prepared to descend with Christ into the chaos and mess of the African world and from there pronounce God's power over them and thereby working to inaugurate God's kingdom in both individual hearts and social structures. The thrust of the proposition I put forward is that liberation is not possible without embracing the call to descend into the heart of Africa according to the pattern of Christ's descent into the heart of the world. Seen from this perspective, the task of the church or of a theologian does not consist primarily in formulating theological principles and propositions from an overseeing vantage position. Rather, it is in humbly reflecting together with people on their lived experiences, and from their own location, in the light of the gospel. From these prayer or meditation, theology can make a positive contribution to the African social world by imbuing it with Christian values and actions and thereby inaugurate the kingdom of God in the here and now of Africa.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This dissertation was prompted by both an interest to contribute to the ongoing search for an interpretative framework for African theology on the one hand, and a appreciation for Balthasar's theo-dramatic theology on the other. Out of this twofold interest developed a research question: Can Balthasar's kenotic theology offer a fruitful underpinning for African liberation theology? After a rigorous engagement with the development of African liberation theology and with Balthasar's kenotic theology, I have argued for an African liberation theology that has kenosis as its basic structure and orientation. To arrive at this postulation, I have undertaken a historical analysis of African theology, tracing the development of its major strands and trajectories. Although I have argued for a continuity between inculturation and liberation theology, I nonetheless have affirmed that the need to shift the emphasis from the former to the latter was legitimate because inculturation had to give way so that the liberative potential of the gospel can be evoked on the African reality.

African liberation theology integrates the historical and social contingencies of the African people with theological reflection, thereby shedding a theological light on the social evils tormenting the African continent. In this way, it calls for the church to exercise its responsibilities in a continent that is gripped by corruption, marginalisation, exploitation, famine, diseases, and high mortality rates. The church cannot afford to be merely preoccupied with ritual celebrations or to engage itself in theological enterprises that have no bearing on the prevailing social evils that afflict the people. Notwithstanding the need to be part of the great church's patrimony, I have argued that in addition to being educated in classical theology (characterised, as it were, by its systematisation and philosophical categories) African theologians have the task to formulate theological language and content from their contact with the people's real experiences. This attentiveness takes seriously the African person and the richness of his history and lived experience from which he encounters and responds to God's call. I concur with Ela that Christianity cannot take the African social reality seriously if it is framed and entangled in discourses far detached from the experience of the people. For as long as the church leaders accept to enjoy a certain privileged status in the society, the church will continue to be indifferent to the plight of the majority poor. African liberation theology therefore urges the church to insert itself into the life of local communities, thereby putting itself at their service, not by providing prescriptive solutions for every problem but, more importantly, by building communities of people which can effect

the changes and transformations that they desire. This approach, I hope, can undercut the dominant missionary theology of the "salvation of souls" and offer a soteriology that is integrative and all-encompassing of the African person's needs.

Because African liberation theology belongs to a wider discourse of liberation theology, it cannot be discussed without regards to the warnings and criticisms that have been levelled against the former. However, instead of applying these critiques directly to African liberation theology, I have employed Balthasar's kenotic theology as a critical tool to analyse it, and thereafter have proposed that certain aspects of Balthasar's kenotic ideas can offer a basis for African liberation theology. Confronted with Balthasar' kenotic theology, the problematics of African liberation theology are highlighted. African liberation theology exhibits a certain naivety in the way it takes for granted the forces sustaining and driving world affairs, to the extent that it undermines its subversive impulses on the Christian who has to act in the world while at the same time not fully belonging to it. With no corresponding stress on the primacy of anchorage in Christ as the normative principle for every action, the danger of succumbing to the temptation to exercise influence as other worldly powers do is inevitable in African liberation theology. One possible consequence of following this particular path is to shun every occasion of suffering or whatever does not appear to result in success. The liberation that is being worked or hoped for then has to be sought and achieved at all costs. In this way, the kingdom of God risks being conflated with the attainment of happiness and prosperity in history. Activism in the world is thus stressed as the privileged *locus salvificus* at the expense of other spiritualties that are not directly related to alleviating human misery through social actions. Furthermore, the expectation African liberation theology puts in the church portrays the church as a powerful and triumphant institution that is capable of exercising authority in the world. Although this is true, considering that the church acts in the world on behalf of, and with Christ, it nonetheless can be misleading because the church can become a self-referential institution that does not rely on an external force for its life and mission. Consequently, it could be seen as an institution or community of people who do not stand in need of conversion and renewal, and who are clothed in self-righteousness as judges of the world with their ears closed to the laments and changes in the world around them.

To overcome the foregoing problematics with African liberation theology, I have employed aspects of Balthasar's theology, particularly his Christological kenosis, which I

argue should determine the method, content and aim of African liberation theology. Using Christ's kenosis as a theological principle guards against reductionism because that which is temporal or historical is considered always in relation to its eschatological vision. I have postulated that this is the legitimate starting point for doing African liberation theology. After claiming this firm ground, I have contended that one can safely descend into the heart of the world as an empowered person whose authority and ability is derived and given. It involves renouncing one's privileged position to move to the location of the poor and the marginalised, and from sharing their reality, one is able to discern and work out their liberation with them. The life of self-dispossession is a vocation that every Christian discovers and embraces with his or her incorporation into Christ. Seen from this vantage point, the church therefore becomes a serving community with each member being at the service of the other and without lording it over others. Furthermore, whilst located in the midst of the people, a theologian is enabled to have a grasp of the feeling and aspiration of the people and together with them discern the will of God and the concrete steps and actions to be taken in each circumstance.

In a continent that is characterised by the paradox of co-existence of an increasingly popular Christianity and prevalent social evils, I assert that the gospel must be brought into direct confrontation with these realities. To ensure this encounter, the church and every believer is invited to take the kenotic path as exemplified by the life of Christ. In embracing the kenotic principle, an African theologian brings forth the performative dimension of theology and thereby reflect, announce and inaugurate the kingdom of God in the present.

Despite my emphatic proposal for kenotic African liberation theology, I must admit, however, that the discourse remains in great part an *ad intra* conversation proposing the path the church in Africa must take if it has to remain relevance and stay true to its nature and mission in the world. Balthasar's kenotic theology as well as Ela's liberation theology earnestly urge the church and the baptised to brace themselves and get involved in the world. However, it remains to be determined how kenotic African liberation theology can in reality bring about the holistic liberation so desired in Africa. Neither Balthasar or Ela gives any clear guidelines for practical engagement of the church as an institution or community of people facing the world with all its complexities. Internal conversation and chastening of the community of believers are not enough to bring out social liberation and transformation. This dimension of kenotic liberation theology is open to further research in the future.

SAMENVATTING

Deze dissertatie levert een bijdrage aan de hedendaagse theologische discussies die zoeken naar een theologisch interpretatiekader voor het Afrikaanse continent. Het belang van deze zoektocht bestaat in de problematiek van het sociaal kwaad op een continent waar het christendom een dominante religie is. Kritiek en vermaningen aan het adres van de bevrijdingstheologie, met name van de Vaticaanse Congregatie voor de Geloofsleer, moeten worden erkend. Desalniettemin betoog ik in deze thesis dat Afrikaanse bevrijdingstheologie de meest relevante theologie blijft voor het Afrikaanse continent. tegelijkertijd beweer ik dat haar vruchtbaarheid een stuk groter wordt wanneer elementen van de kenotische theologie van Hans Urs von Balthasar worden geïncorporeerd. Door de oorsprong en ontwikkeling van Afrikaanse bevrijdingstheologie te onderzoeken heb ik vastgesteld dat 'bevrijding' altijd een belangrijke drijvende kracht is geweest achter theologieën van adaptatie, verinheemsing, en inculturatie. Met de aandachtsverschuiving van inculturatie naar bevrijding is het inzicht gegroeid dat, hoewel de bevrijdende kracht van het evangelie hoogst relevant is voor de moeilijkheden waardoor de Afrikaanse samenleving wordt geplaagd, deze bevrijding betrekkelijk weinig invloed heeft gehad op de transformatie van de Afrikaanse sociale werkelijkheid. Mijn voorkeur gaat toch uit naar de bevrijdingstheologie, maar ik pleit ervoor dat deze theologie een christologische basis en oriëntatie moet hebben. Mijn stelling is dat Afrikaanse bevrijdingstheologie de plaatsvervangende kenosis van Christus als hermeneutische sleutel nodig heeft om het bevrijdende potentieel van het evangelie te kunnen verkondigen en implementeren. Het bereflecteren van de kenotische vorm van Christus is van belang omdat dit het risico van antropologisch triomfalisme en de historisering van verlossing vermijdt, terwijl deze visie tegelijkertijd de komst van het koninkrijk van God in de contingente geschiedenis verdedigt. Nadat ik het kenotisch denken van Balthasar samen met de theologische geschriften van Jean-Marc Ela heb vergeleken, heb ik aangetoond dat Balthasars kenotische theologie een constructieve kritiek kan bieden op de Afrikaanse bevrijdingstheologie. Balthasar stelt dat God zichzelf in Christus heeft geopenbaard op kenotische wijze. Jezus in zijn zelfbeperking en door zijn opoffering nodigt iedereen die hem wil volgen uit om hetzelfde te doen. Vanuit dit kenotische perspectief bevordert de Afrikaanse bevrijdingstheologie niet enkel het bevrijdende motief van het evangelie in het christelijk bewustzijn, maar presenteert het - nog belangrijker - het evangelie ook als een levende kracht om de sociale situatie van binnenuit te transformeren.

SUMMARY

This dissertation makes a contribution to the contemporary theological conversations that search for a theological interpretative framework for the African continent. The relevance of the quest is given greater impetus by the existing paradox of prevalent social evils in a continent where Christianity is gaining significantly greater acceptance. Criticism and admonitions regarding aspects of liberation theology, notably from the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, must be acknowledged. Nonetheless I contend that African liberation theology remains the most relevant theology for the African continent. However, I propose that its potential fruitfulness will be greatly enhanced through incorporating elements of the kenotic theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. In exploring the origins and development of African liberation theology, I have established that 'liberation' has always been a major driving force underlying adaptation, indigenisation and inculturation theologies. And with the shift of emphasis from inculturation to liberation, there has been growing recognition that while the liberation thrust of the gospel is highly relevant to the predicaments besetting African society, by and large it has had little influence in the transformation of the African social reality.

While favouring African liberation theology, I argue that it must have a Christological basis and orientation. My contention is that if it is to both elicit and implement the liberative potential of the gospel message, African liberation theology must have the vicarious kenosis of Christ as its hermeneutical key.

Upholding the form of Christ is fruitful in that it successfully avoids the risk of falling into anthropological triumphalism and historicization of salvation while at the same time pursuing and inaugurating the kingdom of God within the contingent history. After critically examining the kenotic thinking of Balthasar alongside Jean-Marc Ela's theological writings, I have argued that Balthasar's kenotic theology can offer a constructive critique to African liberation theology. Balthasar asserts that God in Christ has revealed himself as a kenotic being. Jesus evinces self-limitation and sacrifice as the life of the triune God, and has invited everyone who wants to follow him to embrace the same.

From the foregoing perspective, kenotic African liberation theology does not only foster the liberative motive of the gospel in the Christian consciousness but it also, and more importantly, presents the gospel as a living force for transforming their social situation from within. In this task a theologian can only be effective if he is a constructive participant alongside the people in their actual life experiences.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Ibiko Morris Masiri was born on 15 August 1979 in Tombura, Western Equatorial region of the then Sudan, where he entered primary school in 1986 until 1990 when he and his family had to flee the Sudan's civil war for refuge in the neighbouring Republic of Central Africa. In the refugee camp, he finished his primary education and felt drawn to religious life and entered the minor seminary there. In 1995, he, with the help of the rector of the seminary, took a precarious adventure to Uganda (through the Democratic Republic of Congo) where he continued to study and to follow his desire of becoming a priest. In 1999 he completed his Ordinary level and in 2001 his Advanced level of secondary education. In 2005, he obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy from Uganda's national seminary, affiliated to Urabanian University Rome. In 2006, he proceeded to pursue the priestly training which he completed in 2010 and was awarded a Bachelor's degree in Theology and Religious Studies.

Upon the completion of the seminary formation in 2011, Morris went back to South Sudan and was ordained a deacon and priest for his diocese that same year. After his ordination, he served as a parish priest for two and half years before his bishop asked him to pursue a Master's degree in theology at KU Leuven. In 2014, he obtained a Master's degree and in 2015, an Advanced Master's degree in Theology and Religious Studies at the same institution. From September 2015, Morris embarked on a doctoral program at Radboud University and KU Leuven, under the supervision of professor Christoph Hübenthal and professor Stephan van Erp.

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